

“Still Greater Progress . . .”

(1 Thessalonians 4:1)

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**There is no place for me here;
my only place is in heaven.**

INTRODUCTION

Here are the days of the life of a pilgrim: one who is in this place now, yet is ever striding toward his only Home.

In here written you will find the words of one so called by the Lord to come unto His presence. Yes, in these pages is penned for your approval and the edification of your soul the life of one passing from here to there, that you might know the way to go.

Stand not apart from the Lord's holy Love and His call to your heart; follow in fullness the weight of His light footsteps... And so shall we dwell with He who is, who was, and who is to come, if we but progress in His path to glory.

I

CHILDHOOD

PART ONE

1

There once was a woman named Wisdom who came from a far place to bring light to distant lands. She came to me one day while I was sleeping, and awoke in me a desire for the LORD. (I say she was a woman because she shone with a purity as, I think, only a woman can - though she may very well have been a man.) Yes, while still in the womb, the Spirit of God came to me in the form of a holy messenger. This angel of Light named Wisdom gave to me all purpose there is in Life.

At this time also came the Malevolent One - an angel not of light, but of darkness - who sowed a seed of lustful impurity into my very loins. And, laughing wildly as he left, he cursed God under his breath. He shouted of my imminent doom even as he departed my mother's womb.

And so the struggle was set in place that has plagued the human race; and here it shall be lived again, in the soul of a single man.

It should be remembered by all who read here, as we set forth, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And so the light that Wisdom does bring has power over everything. The soul need only turn to this, to conquer any lingering darkness.

Indeed, the darkness is easily overcome, as shall be seen, with but a word - with a mere utterance of truth. For truth is that which makes it flee, like a rat which scampers from the light of day.

What else shall we say as we begin, to make it evident what meaning is contained herein? Perhaps it is enough to know that Wisdom is born in us from the very start, and light is sure to win the battle over dark.

The womb is such a place that would make the mind of the wisest man lose any proportion he might create by his own hands. For the intricacies of the science of God, His mind which is incomparable to our own, are here displayed in highest form; here is a richness of life we cannot fathom.

We cannot give dimension to the origin of our lives, for we come from nothing, and to nothing we shall return. So the sanctity of this holy place should be revered above all things by our human race.

In the womb is woven the form and pattern of our lives; here it is that life takes shape. The essence of who we are may be found to be existent in this blessed place. Hidden in this darkened cave, the hands of God set the foundation for what we shall become. And from the womb He calls us to come before His throne.

And so it was that Wisdom came to me, as peacefully I lay resting in the comfort of this place. And as she spoke her words to me, certainly my heart did burn within. She took me wholly into her arms and gently breathed upon me, telling me of life so fair that waited for my coming.

I resolved even then, though I could not yet speak, though words were quite unknown to me... I resolved in my spirit to follow the ways of wisdom wherever they might lead. She told me - though, to be sure, it was not in words - that she would never leave, that she would always be there for me. And so she became my own.

Now, the coming of the Malevolent One was not unforeseen by me, for of him Wisdom had spoken; from him she bid me keep. And though she feared he should cause me great trouble, she reassured me he would indeed flee, if I but called out to He who is the Holy One.

So when he came, though I did quiver and shake to see the sight of him, from his wiles I managed to remain free - though there would be battles he would win, as you shall plainly see. But let us be on with our story, that time will not be lost on any triviality.

3

Birth brought new life, as it is wont to do. And so I became a new creation, taken on new form. Yes, I was born with a body like a stone balloon, as I was removed from my mother's womb.

Into the light of day I was brought - out into the air. Upon the face of this whole earth I now was bound to walk - with two hands, two arms, two legs... and a mouth to talk. Nothing like it did I feel before, as the darkness I left - but who could know what was in store.

A most amazing sensation, this being born of woman... like coming out into a clearing - from being lost in the shade of a forest's trees, to entering the unadulterated light of the sun.

And movements now were new - freer could I breathe. No longer confined by liquid darkness, I now could stretch my limbs. And though ungainly and without purpose, at least I could begin to be. And the sounds I heard now came clearer; voices were more than the beating of a heart. And though some familiarity was now forsaken, the promise of this new place assuaged any fears that pricked my pride.

Birth brought with it wonderful possibilities; there is certainly nothing in this world that can compare to the opening horizons birth discovers. I may have been able to fly someday; I may have been able to swim like a fish. I may have been able to walk or to run, or to write the story of my life.

4

The angelic touch of God's messenger had anointed my skin and made it pure. My soul it was as white as snow; my mind was clear as glass. I was as whole as I could be - save for the Malevolent's seed.

God's peace was with me. God's light shone about me. His love was in my heart. And even then did I begin to speak with His only Son.

Jesus it was (and still is) who principally kept me from the sway of the evil one. And, I found, that even when I'd lost my way, He was near to me. The darkness produced in my life had come only from my fleeing Him. For if at any moment in this deepening well I had turned around but once, He would have lifted me from there, and restored my heart to peace. (As He has done.)

In my new-born state, I truly knew God's grace. The purity of time I felt at the beginning of this my life was as no other sensation would be. The most I could hope to find later was a recapturing of this moment, a renewal of my soul that would enable me to live again as purely as now I did in God's all holy light. For the clear wonder of these days before my fall would remain thoroughly unsurpassed by any later time.

Through Baptism I came to know this marvelous sense of newness beyond all compare. The flow of the waters over me and the blood of Christ upon me - I was made clean. This coupled with my own newness to this earth made for a start of freshness unparalleled. For to know new birth in this world is a certain wonder we all undergo. To pass through the waters of my mother's womb and come into the light of creation was a phenomenal sensation. But to be washed in the waters of the Spirit, to be made clean from sin, to be so renewed within myself and baptized into God's Church - this is that which passeth understanding, which goes beyond the glory mere words can express... And so was Satan's seed sent fleeing; so he would be forever on the run and stripped of power, by this cleansing in Christ's blood.

I cannot express my gratitude to the Lord for the sacrament He gave me to begin my life. I know He thought only to make me ready for this world. I know He wished to do this to keep me from the world, though in the world I had to be. I know this served as protection, as it continues with me (and with all His children). This first sacrament was most important in the salvation of my soul. And so I thank you, Jesus. And so I begin my spiritual life.

5

The Baptism of the Lord which brings us into His holy fold, which calls upon angelic wings to surround us with their white protection... being thus bathed in the Light of the Lord, we find undying comfort. This we find invaluable as we continue through our lives.

And now as I began my walk upon the road on which I'd been placed, the Lord's protection reassured me - it indeed caused all fear to fly. So the dark shadows of my room at night led me not to quake; rather, they inspired only wonder and a quiet sense of joy. For my eye was fixed not upon the darkness, but on the light that caused it.

This was as my life was, and how I looked upon it - for as long as light and life were there, the dark could not overcome me.

6

As the objects strung over my crib spun above my head, I looked at them and wondered in silence about all things and the way they are. What about the shadows in my room and the street lights and moon outside? Why is it the moon always follows me? What about the clouds up in the sky? And what about the rain that falls every night and helps me sleep aright?

The curtains on my windows sometimes form the most grotesque shapes. In their folds and at their tops I'd see the monster faces - large noses and chins, dark eyes and twisted ears - and other forms and figures. But nothing more do I recall about these things than a silent fascination. Because the Spirit of the Lord and His angel, Wisdom, were near unto me, no fear or trembling affected me - no horror did I know. And so even then I knew, that though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I should fear no evil.

So, most of the time I rested comfortably, or ate or drank in peace. Going to the bathroom I did quite naturally, not questioning the reasons for this.

Hours I would spend in thought, with a toy, or turning the pages of a book. The reverie of this time amazed and set me free. With loving parents and a home prepared, I could simply be. No worry infringed upon the peace of this domicile; so I was able to sit and play or simply to smile.

Inside I would speak with the Lord of my days, conversing ever so lightly: "O Lord, see you that? O Lord, see you this? O Lord, what there is all around here!"

"Yes, my son." He would quietly answer. "About this you are right. This world I have created for you should brighten you and make you smile. For it is my joy to see you pleased; I wish only to make you happy."

And so these earliest days were lived in relative comfort and peace, without even the Malevolent One able to enter in. The Lord watched over me; His Wisdom was near me, and the tranquility of this time was nary broken or disturbed - I was left quite free.

And so a firm foundation was being set, to support the cornerstone that was my time in the womb; and so the Spirit of Wisdom ministered unto me, to protect and keep me right; and so the innocent heart of me was being formed in its light.

7

These days are like no other. Who can say what goes on in the mind of a child? How can the mind of man penetrate there, where eyes continually behold the angels? As if in heaven the child dwells, untouched by the soiled earth. Human hands cannot contrive the glory that is present in the pure heart of a child, in his blessed soul.

And so I was in my earliest days, free of any earthly darkness - apart from any temptation of the soul. In my heart I held the kingdom's glory, which I believed would never cease. Within me lived the Lord's true presence; this is what Wisdom did give.

In the richness of this purity I found the grounds for holiness. In it I dwelled, and let the Lord anoint me with its Light.

Protected from evil I was able to prepare my life in its length of days. The seed of the Malevolent One made dormant by the waters of Baptism, I found no blockage for the influx of the Spirit. And so the Spirit did fill me. And so this Light, so unknown by the soiled mind of man, began to take root within my being. And so, all fear having fled away, I was able to undergo in confidence the formation of my soul.

As the days passed, I found myself strengthened by the touch of the Lord. The wisdom of God upon my shoulder, I listened to its sacred voice. And though the ear of man is deaf to its silent voice, the sound of it imparted volumes of understanding to my waiting heart. The voice of Wisdom spoke to me of all things known to God, and in its pools I refreshed myself and found the substance of my life.

Nothing can compare to the glory of this wisdom. No idea conceived by man can cast light upon its presence. For the wisdom of God is unlike our own - it is far above our highest thought.

And so, only by yielding ourselves to its speaking, only by making our minds as that of a child, can we hope to perceive what the Lord would tell us, can we begin to understand the meaning of our lives.

8

Yes, childhood was a wonderful time for me. And being carried as a babe in arms surpassed the glory of any later time. I imagine this time to be comparable to the innocence known by Adam and Eve in the Garden. I knew little or nothing in this time. I simply was. I existed relatively unperturbed by the distractions and temptations of this world.

My parents provided for my every need. They fed me. They cleaned me. They took me wherever I needed to go. I didn't need to think or worry about a thing; in virtual purity I lived and breathed. And though, as I say, the devil would sometimes hover about my crib, his hauntings I would never seriously take in.

The innocence of the time in the Garden is pervasive. It fills the air and all the things around our souls with its naiveté. And in this artless simplicity, in this lack of contrivance on our parts - in the innocuousness of our actions is a blessed state of grace. We cannot be but happy. We cannot be but glad, though we may be unaware of our felicity.

In fact, I would say, it is this not being conscious of our condition which serves to prolong this holy purity. For once we see where we are and how it is we are being, the devil is quick to remove it from our possession. Once we say, this is what is, what is is gone from our sight. And so in innocence we must remain, if its blessing we are to retain.

But, alas, we know we are doomed to falter. For we have within us that seed of original sin. And though we might choose to continue as a child, to maintain our God-given naiveté, yet the temptation is too much for us; and the beckoning of sin and our own self-will fails not to overcome us.

Yet we should also remember that we carry that child within us wherever we go: what we have been remains part of us and will be obedient to our genuine call. If we wish to regain our lost innocence, if we would enkindle again that flame, we need only to come to Jesus, and it will be born again.

The Light that does surround us when we are children, when we exist in God's pure and holy grace, never really leaves us as we grow older, as we fall and dirty our hands and face. For the temptation of the devil is but an illusion, a shining of false light, and the power of Jesus is always able to dispel it, if this is what we desire in our lives.

So, I encourage you to turn around, to remember the innocence that is in you. I suggest in humility that you sanctify your lives once more, to redeem what has died. Open your eyes, wide, as a baby, if you wish to see the light. Hand over your will to His grace, return it to its proper place, and you will begin to find the bygone glory; you will begin to see the light of the Garden returning to your life. The holy kingdom of the New Jerusalem will come to your presence and reform your life, if you would but bare your soul.

But as for this time of innocence, as for the simplicity of this life, much must be said.

The seed of sin sown in my loins would prick my soul to bleeding guilt throughout the course of my life, and this blood would have to be joined with Christ's in order for me to be cleansed. But in this time, as has been said, it was more the glory of innocence I knew; it was protection and lack of consciousness which ruled these days of newness.

The glory I would later experience upon the forgiveness of my sins was not like the life I led now in pure innocence. The vision of my eyes could not yet separate things, and so all things were to me as one - there was little sense of what was dark and what was blessed with light. My muscles were not yet formed. I could not yet walk. Only sounds I could make with my mouth - no words to be understood by man.

Like living underwater (water that cannot drown) or living in the air were these days, for my feet were not yet rooted to the ground. Crawling and rolling through my life, floating in space in someone's arms - I knew no bruise of earthly sin, I felt no hardness of its heart. Content was I to live in this relative amorphousness. I knew not the strength and solidity of the earth, nor its potential ungodliness.

This was a time only for a kind of growth. It was a time not only for the growth of my limbs and the growth of my eyes and mind, but also for the incubation of my spirit, which would later sprout. In the soft heart of my innocence and unconsciousness the Spirit of Wisdom was allowed to work. Without refusal from my will, it could freely accomplish its mission. And as my limbs and muscles grew, they were duly imbued with the Spirit's graces.

And so as one whole being I grew, and was formed in God's light. In my body and in my soul, His hand was present and performing its work. And as I stretched my arms out wide, the Spirit would extend inside; and as my eyes would open up, the Light would enter there. I held the hand of my father, and my Father led me forth; my mother fed me with the spoon of the earth, and I was nourished by its milk.

“Come with me for a walk,” He would say. “See the wooden boat upon the lake. Watch the bird fly across my sky. Listen as the river runs, moving from place to place. Take the hand of your father I have given to watch over you. Heed the requests your mother gives, and never turn from me. I will protect thy soul as the clothes on thy back protect thy skin. I will anoint you with my Spirit, and bring you to my well to drink. Take your time on this earth and use it wisely. Never go too far afield. And I will be with you every day, even in the troubling sea.”

10

The graces that came in this time of innocence would be ones which would never leave me. The voice of the Lord and the Spirit of Wisdom which spoke to me in these impressionable years would remain to comfort me in times of trial. Never would the sweet voice of Jesus which was with me in my infancy fail to speak to me as I grew.

For the troubling sea was a distant fantasy in this time of purity and wonder, and a distance so it would always keep. This was reality. This was the foundation upon which life was set. This peace and this truth were all that mattered, and are all that have weight in life. And though the devil may attempt to cloak them in darkness, the pure vision known in the innocent heart will inevitably conquer any distraction with the truth of its naiveté.

I see the faces of my family looking down or up at me. And the faces of the strangers bear a strict resemblance to those which I see every day. There is a beauty in the human animal, though not as apparent as the animals in the zoo I see.

Upon these animals I look in wonder. I find in them an innocence not unlike my own. I want to reach out my hand to touch them; I want to hold out my arms to hug them. They are to me as kindred spirits. With them I feel so comfortable. I long to spend my days in their presence; I wish to share my life in their care.

But soon I must go home from there. Soon the animals must be left behind. And I always turn around, not wanting to go, straining to be with them as long as I can.

Children and animals share the common bond of innocence. There is oneness in their lacking of the fall. They know not the disgrace of disobedience; they know not taking matters in their hands. There is a special blessing that comes to us through the animals, just as there is from the children's smiles. They are a reminder of our lost innocence; they are a call to be refreshed and return to our Father's home.

One wonders how we can mistreat the animals - how can we fail to see them as children in our care? (From the evil that is in us comes the exploitation of innocence. The destruction of our planet and fellow creatures comes from the selfishness we bear.) As a child reaches out his hand to touch the wet nose of a sheep or goat, we should remember our vocation as protectors of the earth, as caretakers of the life hereon.

Learn from the child. Remember thine own innocence and peace. The graces of the Lord are poured upon all creation, and so should be nurtured by our hands.

The children and the animals will indeed bear you graces; they will return you to your lost innocence.

11

Our feet tread the pure ground of the Garden. In days gone by we lived as one upon this earth. And God walked with us in His Garden. He breathed with us and made us His sons.

The Light was pure. Our lives were simple, and wonderful. The breeze through the trees we would breathe brought eternal refreshment to our souls. And all lived in peace.

The serenity of this time and of this place filled the atmosphere with its perfect quietude. There was no disturbance to be heard. There was barely a word spoken. Untroubled by the corruption of sin, all life lived in harmony.

And our senses were as one. We as individuals were whole as well. There was no separation of our senses into categories. Life simply was, and we simply sensed it - our experience of life remained undivided. All that was around us was in us and all that was in us was reflected around us. Life was whole and we were an integral part of Life.

And this is as it is when we are children. As babes in arms, the world around us is indeed part of us. We are one with our environment. And our home at this time is a blessed place; this unity makes it so. As we were one with our mother in the womb, so we are as one with this earth when we are new born. And so our affection for the animals is so pronounced, for they are ever so united to creation.

Yes, in the beginning we walked with the animals; we lived so peaceably with them and the earth. We named the animals - they were as our dearest pets. I can but say we loved them. And the trees and the clouds in the sky, the moon and the light in our eyes... all things we loved with deep and abiding, undeniable affection.

And God walked with us then. That is why we were so peaceful; that is why we were so united. Our Father made us one. His presence kept us whole. We were His beloved creation, and with us He was most pleased. And being His beloved creatures, we carried that love with us, sharing it with all. We were of love, for we were of God; and all was united by that love.

The most primitive among us would hold on to that love, to that unity - to that integrity of creation. They hold the last vestiges of purity in a dying world. They remain at the core of humanity, grasping the remnants of our integrity.

But the world is gone. It has long since died. The Fall of man resounds through all of creation, and our only salvation is to be made anew. And so Christ offers us the redemption of our souls and new life.

We may again walk with God. Even now His Spirit does invite us to His presence. Even now the cross and cry of Christ call all men to repentance and the unity so long lost. In Him we are one again. With Him the Father shall dwell with us. Purged by the fire of the Holy Spirit, we become as children once more.

Growing up in this world, at this time of such destruction of our very nature - at this the end of the age - cannot be felicitously compared to the absolute purity known at the dawn of creation, and yet the LORD touches every life with a distinct sense of our original glory, that we may all possess some semblance of His Love, and so desire to be with Him once more.

The Hand of God is upon every child. Their angels in heaven do always behold His face, and there is nothing human hands can do to destroy the purity of God.

We may pollute our atmosphere and the clear, crystal streams of our environment. We may slaughter the animals and even one another. We may hold all life in contempt and respect none of its laws. But the child lives on. The Love of God and Light of Christ are undisturbed by the sins of men.

And so, though growing up in a place wrought with man's cancerous darkness, yet I remained of the peace born of the Spirit of God. Innocence permeated my life.

Walking through these days down city streets, holding the hands of my parents - standing either side of me they would lift me over any curbs without breaking stride. Nothing there was to trip me up; my feet were kept from stumbling. Or, wheeled around in my carriage of love, I was well able to float through my days.

Looking at things around myself, I wondered at the pictures I'd see... the birds on the pond, the stick boat with the leaf sail, and the breath and stature of the people. All things were bathed in the light of this wonder, though the necessities of life took precedence. And so, at the World's Fair, though I remember the fountain and the windows of the train, it is with greater clarity, brought on by an urgency, that I recall the Coca-Cola sign over the bathroom door.

These early memories are pervaded by a deep sense of quietude - a silence within myself that provided direction and purpose for my life. The silence within it was (and is) that served as the foundation of my soul. And this silence, this quiet, this inner

reflection of soul, permeated all when I was a child. (This is that which many need to recapture, which has been obscured by the anxiety of living in this world.)

If there was only one thing I could possess, I would pray it be this quiet. For from this quiet all things are born. In my life as a writer, all words spring from this quiet. God is in this quiet; His silence remains unperturbed. And so, if we have access to this source of life itself, we have access to all life.

So lose not the silent wonder at your innocent heart. Let it fill all things in your life with its beauty, with its light. Let the dark clouds of doubt and fear be blown away by its joy and awe; let love penetrate to the recesses of your soul.

PART TWO

1

God remains. Yes, whatever we may do, however we may sin - God remains unchanged. The purity of His Light shines forever. The innocence of the child continues unaffected. And we may return to Him at any time. He waits with open arms for us to return as children to His glory.

As a child I remember how marvelous it was to sit upon the lap of Santa Claus at Christmastime. I recall my eager and joyful apprehension as we drove to the department store with the huge abstract painting on its outside wall. And crossing the bridge, suspended in the air... how excited we were as we drew nearer our goal.

Then, waiting on line, approaching his throne - how my heart beat so fast, how I was overwhelmed with anticipation of that moment when my mother would place me upon the lap of the man with the big red suit. And as I sat there and touched his white beard and his soothing voice gravelled in my ear - it brings a tear to my eye to think of the warmth inside my soul. Could there have been a moment more blessed? Could I have found a place more like home?

Such excitement. Such pure wonder. Such love. Beyond compare is the joy of a child at Christmastime. How do you describe the feeling of a child waking on a Christmas morning in a home blessed with parents' love and the happiness gifts that come from a loving heart can bring?

As I recall this joy, this sheer happiness, this newness of spirit I felt, I can't help but consider those who have never known a Christmas morning - both those who are ignorant of the Lord's

coming and those who may be too deprived of resources to celebrate this event. Yet I am reminded of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and by my own wisdom and experience as an adult I know it is the former alone which precludes this joy; the latter is but circumstantial. And I know, too, that there is nothing in this world that can dampen the spirit of a child - not poverty, not even ignorance - for God has blessed each with the wonder of His Light. (Though I pray all children could be blessed as I've been.)

Waking on a Christmas morning - sweeter words are seldom heard. These words could certainly inspire reams of poetry from each of our hearts. Oh to capture that moment! Oh to live in its beauty forevermore! So shall it be when the Lord returns. It is this the Holy Spirit brings to us.

Living in a child's heart forevermore. Dwelling in this blessed peace and love. So comes the end of all wars. So comes the end of disease. So all death is banished from our midst and all things are made new.

I remember decorating the Christmas tree. (I remember the tinsel especially). I remember my Christmas stocking. I remember my mother's Christmas cookies and cream puffs. I remember saying grace before the meal. I remember the love of my relatives and friends. I'll remember these things forever.

There is no end to the world of God. With Him it is always Christmas morning. In His arms and upon His lap we shall find His glory, as we become His children once more.

2

There is a breeze that blows upon the ocean waters, and as you walk along the beach or boardwalk, or on the streets that are near the ocean's shoreline, the smell of the salt sea air fills your lungs with its freshness.

From the time I was a toddler I spent my summers in this ocean paradise with my family and my cousins. All in the same house, we thrived on the love and closeness of family, of living as one in this world.

These were the most glorious days of my life. The happiness of these times remains unparalleled. The sheer joy of jumping up and down and dancing upon our beds; of listening to the radio at the beach and singing the memorized lyrics; of playing pinball; of going night swimming; of eating ice cream on the hot sand; of staying up late, four boys in a small room, talking and playing made-up games... sometimes I might experience this joy alone with my brother and sister or a close friend, but here the bliss was multiplied by the close presence of my cousins.

I remember the way we'd rub our heads into my little sister's belly, just to see her laugh. She was the youngest among us and to see her wide eyes and bright smile would light up our hearts and minds. The room would become filled with her laughter and all of us couldn't help but join in. (There is an innocence that still exists until this day. Be assured of this.)

I remember also when other cousins would come for a time, and the house would be filled to bursting. (The kingdom of heaven must be like this, the joy of all love flowing over.) And we would be sleeping everywhere. And we would be talking all night. And our games and our laughter would abound even more... Nothing can compare to these times.

I loved my cousins so much. All of my family was so close... And during the year our families would visit to rekindle the bond of our unity - and with what great anticipation we would await their coming, or approach their house in our car. For when we got together, there was only happiness; instantly, joy would overtake us. I cannot recall a single cross word or negative feeling throughout these days of my childhood. The love that bound us together was beyond our making, and could not be dissolved by our human hands.

So many memories come to my mind about this time, I would be hard pressed to number them. I remember buying bait from a little shack and crabbing in the bay; I remember sading in the other bay with old sneakers upon my feet; I remember burying things in the sand or around the house, hoping to find them next year; I remember how we used to dig huge holes in the sand - sometimes two with tunnels between - and how my cousin and I would make a concentric circular path in a mound of sand to allow a ball to roll

around from top to bottom... and I remember the mischievous games we'd play upon the boardwalk, annoying those who ran the stands. And though through this all the Malevolent's seed was barely known, it did begin to reveal its plan.

For already my eye'd begun to wander. Already I'd begun to notice and desire the sight of the bare flesh of woman. The lustful seeds were beginning to sprout within the heart of me.

3

Since I'd learned to eat with knife and fork, there wasn't much else I needed to do. Potty training had been quite difficult, particularly dealing with the embarrassment caused by picture-taking, and I still wet the bed - which I would do for several years - but now that eating became easier, the world was all ahead of me.

I mastered the art of shoe-tying at a fairly early age (though I still practice only the simpler double-bow method), and my independence continued to grow. I recall the first day of kindergarten - as other children cried for their mommies, I watched my mother wave good-bye and exit out the door. I remember her head in the windows as she passed down the hall.

In school I was especially proficient, never needing the help of anyone at home. I felt it was my work and I had to do it alone, and anything else would be akin to cheating. So, any homework assignments were completed by myself, and any responsibilities I would handle on my own. So long as the teacher gave me instructions, I would be fine with anything that needed to be done.

There was always the quietness within me. There was always the voice of Wisdom speaking to me. And this ever lent direction to my life; it faithfully disciplined my soul.

I was always a thoughtful person. From my mother's arms in church I learned reverence. There from my earliest days, the experience of the Mass began to fill me with awe of the Lord's majesty. And the body of Christ was with me. The Spirit of God breathed upon me. And, though far from perfect, I felt as one with the holy Lord.

And yet, how soon my eye would indeed begin to wander. How quickly these days of absolute purity would come to an end, and the ways of the world would begin to close in. But still, these days were longer than I can remember, and the well of experience these days offer is deeper than I can imagine, and remains a source of cleansing grace for my now-polluted soul.

Yes, as I recall the nooks and crannies, the weeds in empty fields, and the barren and despoiled places that darkened my mind - these sites where we would find the temptation of our souls in the pages of an illicit book or magazine... as I recall the darkness wrought by this lascivious search for the sins of the flesh displayed in back-and-white and color, so I am left in amazement at how I could have lost that which was so good, that which was so pure. And I know the seed that was sown within me, even from my birth, even from conception... I know that Satan's malevolency is a curse not easily shed. I know only absolute mastery, through the blood of Christ, will reconcile all these sins and return me to how I once was.

Yes, we were meant to walk forever in God's heavenly light. We were meant to dwell eternally in His glorious might. This was the will of the Father. And the only way to rediscover what we have lost, the only way back to the Father and our intended beatific existence is through the sacrifice of the Son. Only He can reconcile us with the Father. Only He can remove our sins. Only He can cleanse our feet, that we might walk the grounds of Eden once more.

4

The ever present beating of a heart I had known in the womb was now becoming quite forgotten. The new world I'd been presented with was fast becoming my world, and I was growing most comfortable with it.

The days of this age were still filled with a joy, but that joy was becoming tempered by an increasing consciousness. Now I was thinking. Now I was discriminating. Now I was beginning to separate things around me.

No longer was life as one large blur. No longer were all things so united. Telling one thing from another, I began to develop my person - and so were born the seeds of my pride.

There was now a "me." There was now an "I." And though not evil in itself, this did indeed signal the first of many stages along my path away from God.

For with it came desires peculiar to me. With it came a sense of what I want, what I think. Because of it I began to believe that I could own things and be a separate one. With this burgeoning sense of identity came also a sense that certain things were owed to me - as well as an awakening of the carnal desires.

Now I could say, "This is my toy. This is my book. I want that food. I don't like that man." Now also my eye began to rest upon that which breeds greed and lust. I began to covet riches. I began to long for pleasures. And though one must certainly grow and develop as a person, this development was inevitably sown with weeds that corrupt.

And this is why Wisdom warned me to be careful, why Wisdom warned me to eschew the temptations of the evil one. This is why our feet must be careful where they step here, for pitfalls are surrounding each of us. And now I began to slip into some of these seemingly endless pits.

But, for now, the horrors of the world mostly remained a game we would play. Death itself was yet an illusion: something to be pretended. Though having begun to penetrate my skin, and taking some minor hold within... they were far from being processed by me - it would be a long time before they would become a part of me and begin to bear the fruits of corruption in my life. Yet, they were there now. The seeds were indeed being sown, and beginning to take root.

The facts of life. I remember classmates whispering in hallways and talking openly on stairwells - the same stairwells upon which we would try to look up the girls' dresses - about the facts of life. "Don't you know?" And the mocking tone toward those who hadn't heard, who hadn't been told...

I have many memories of trying to piece together what was the cause of the grin upon the faces of the people on T V. What was it they were referring to? Obliquely and with double entendre they would speak in a crass and indiscriminate manner about that which brings new life to this earth.

I clearly recall being pointedly shown an explicit photograph of a carnal act of sex. This was it? No. They were like animals. No more than beasts. And so began the confusion in my mind between love and sex. And the confusion continued to grow, as on my own I attempted to piece together this puzzle, mostly with indecent information and images.

What does it mean? And now I think, why is the human race so bent on perverting that which is so beautiful? Why has it been so despoiled? Why must we be slaves to our sin and glorify that which should be shot? Why are we so inclined to the pollution of our minds and hearts that breathe only darkness? And why must the children continue to suffer for this?

There was no good word in all this time. There was no one to tell of the beauty. There was a sense of love, and a love that is true, propounded by books and television - but it never extended to the physical act. That was always something obscene and made ridiculous by incessant verbal nudging.

So love became something expressed in obscenity - the question of reconciling this remained ever in my mind. (And, to confess, persists in remnants to this day...) Sex was rarely presented as something beautiful, so how could love and marriage be so wonderful? Do they not go hand in hand in marriage? Is not one the expression of the other?

So, in my heart I carried that love which overcomes all and surpasses all - that romantic ideal that sees us living happily ever after... and I was plagued by and pursuant of the desires of the flesh. How these two could coexist, I did not understand.

The desire for flesh began innocently - seeing the naked bottom of a female cousin, coming across a photograph of a nude woman, etc. - but soon grew to the state of obsession. And it became quite difficult to see this as unhealthy, since all others around me seemed to be similarly disposed. Though we knew it was wrong, we were not convicted, and so we continued on...

And how long would it go on?

6

And then there was baseball. There was football, certainly, and basketball, and hockey... as my childhood was lined and seasoned with sports - but mostly, there was baseball.

And the baseball field holds the glory of childhood for me - it is fashioned by eternity. And that day in heaven shall be like my memory of baseball. It shall exceed the wonderful experience I had as a child, because then all the dross will be driven away.

And so it is with childhood, that it is a wonderful experience, and yet not so perfect as memory may make it. And so shall it be on that day, when the winds of God blow the chaff away and all that is left is the pure grain of heaven.

Yes, about baseball there is a purity, that breathes in the glove and the bat and the ball, and the game. The grass of the field gives oxygen to the brain - it is as poetry in motion. And may this mythic sense never obscure the simplicity at its core, for it is a child's game, sown in his simple soul.

We played in little league as children, and that was something special, but baseball for me was after school in the park with my friends, choosing up a game. Setting the parameters ourselves. Adjusting the rules as need be. Playing, in most every sense of the word. Playing on until we'd hear my father whistle - and it was time for dinner.

Catching a pop fly. Fielding a ground ball. Simply playing catch. The pleasure of the game was the pleasure of being a child. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, but to play. I long for the day when all the dross shall be carried away, and the purity of the game will be all that shall remain.

7

These were the times I would lie on my back and watch the clouds move by. In these days, with my friend who was as my twin, inseparable as we were virtually since birth, life was a simple joy. School was boring, for the most part (Sister Inez's third grade class was a notably fun exception) - though I never questioned the necessity to learn - but anything outside of school was made wonderful by the freedom we would find in all we did.

Summers were an eternity of continual happiness. Absolutely unfettered from responsibilities, from cares of this world, our lives were open and infused with the newness each day brings. Even our two-week Christmas vacations bore the stamp of eternity. These were sabbaticals in which rest was palpable to us; the stoppage of the activity of the busy world of books and learning brought a refreshment to our souls we could taste... and it always seemed it would last forever. To us these times did last forever, for we never wasted a moment, and never was a moment tainted by any irresolution as to the purpose of our time - we were on vacation and this is all we knew.

It seems to me somewhere along the line I have lost the sense of Sabbath, and it seems that we, as a society, have done the same.

There seems little sense of rest or stoppage - the wheel set in motion seems never to cease. The business day goes on through the night, and the weekends are for catching up on work. (Oh that we might know the sin in this.)

But as children we never missed this. In fact, all we did was done with all our hearts. We ran until we were tired. We played until the game was over. We expended all our energy, committing ourselves to the gift of play.

And so it was with my friend and me. We would play wiffle ball in his backyard with all our hearts and souls. Our imaginations were in full use as we played our major league games in this small yard. And the joy of winning and the tragedy of losing we played to the hilt - and then soon forgot both.

And we would laugh. And we would imitate others. And we would eat together... We would play Monopoly for hours on the rug of his little living room, until his mother would bring us a sandwich and we would stop and eat and talk - then return to the game. (I must confess, I was pretty good at these board games we would play. Even my father I would beat more often than not. The spirit of competition was strong in me, and the nature of these games was well-suited to my intellect - thus the explanation of my triumphs.)

Life was simple - uncluttered and uncomplicated. Though the threat of war hung always over our heads.

8

The war in Vietnam was something which preoccupied the minds of all young men in the United States, and though it would end - as my mother had always said - several years before I would be eligible, I, too, thought often of the war.

I recall a discussion with my friend, at the age of ten or so, about our potential involvement in the fighting. He believed he had to go - he had to perform his obligation to this country. He had no difficulty with the prospect. I, however, knew from this early age that I could not kill another man. I told my friend I would sooner be killed than kill, for I was not afraid to die, but I was deeply disturbed by the thought of taking another life - specifically, of taking a rifle in my hands and shooting another man. This I simply could not do. So, fleeing to Canada if need be or being jailed for the breaking of some draft law became viable alternatives and present thoughts in my mind.

At the age of eleven or twelve I recall hearing our president promising in a campaign speech to end the war in Vietnam, and asking my mother, "Didn't he say that four years ago?" The world

we live in was already becoming apparent to me. The corruption and vice that rule in this existence was not hidden from me for long. Though I am by every measure an idealist, I have never been blind to that which pervades this world. And though it may fool me for a time in my struggle to find perfection, in my refusal to lose hope, and by my own sinful participation in this world of sin - ultimately, truth always triumphs, and the hollow illusions drawn by the evil one are exposed to the light and turned to dust. And so the darkness shall pass away - the darkness in the world and the darkness in me.

I recall also in this time, one day when I was in my friend's backyard, a skywriter wrote the words "WAR IS OVER" above our heads. The words, the idea, came out of nowhere - without warning, without reason. I remember jumping up and down in celebration for a short time, then, upon returning to earth, discussing this with my friend. We realized it could not be so, and I concluded that perhaps it was celebrating a cease-fire to commemorate the Christmas season. This being decided, our brief joy subsided, and we returned to our game.

I suppose the threat of death has hung over man's head in one form or another ever since the Fall. The wars go on, seemingly without end. (Only in Christ is the threat of death overcome, for in Him is only Life.) The intensity of this dark foreboding would reach a climax in my own life some ten or fifteen years later in the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the pervasive threat of massive destruction. I recall being told of bombs trained upon my town whose fallout was intended to destroy all life in the city of New York.

The politicians of this time preyed upon the hearts of citizens by the employment of this fear, as, I suppose, governments have forever depended upon this provocation - even since Lamech offered his empty threats of physical violence, of militaristic power. The sons of Cain endure to this day, attempting to lead astray the hearts subject to the wiles of this world. But they hold no sway with God's children of Light. For the sword shall soon vanish and those who brandish it as well, but the Word of God shall never pass away - it shall bring the kingdom which has no end.

Communion. Communion with the Lord. A blessed gift was this to me, is this to all His children in the Church. The gift by which we remember His death, His sacrifice for our sins - the shedding of His blood. The sacrament which makes real for us the flesh of the living Lord. The sacrament around which the Mass is built.. And at eight years of age I was to make my first Holy Communion.

I recall the nuns' strict instruction regarding the reverence of the wafer that becomes Christ's body. They went so far as to say that our fingers would burn if we so much as touched the host in our mouths. How ironic this seems now that reception in the hands is commonplace. (And to think that I myself have served as minister of the Holy Eucharist - impressing upon the tongues of the flock the flesh of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ.) But I do not begrudge the sisters' use of hyperbole to illustrate the sanctity of Christ's presence to children in need of clear direction. What amazes me is that so many years later I could be so ignorant of the Church's belief in the Eucharist - I seemed to never know that this host was the actual transubstantiated body of our Lord, and that the wine became as His real blood. Perhaps the teaching of the Church leaders is as much to blame as my own lack of intelligence.

But the taking of my first Holy Communion was treated with due reverence by all those who prepared us for such a feast. And the ritual and the disposition of the participants was fitting for such a sacrament. And though not entirely conscious of the weight of the matter at hand, I nonetheless was filled with properly fearful awe of the presence of the Lord.

Then, we would kneel at the altar rail and wait for the priest to come to us. And as he passed down the line, there was certain anticipation of the moment when he would deliver the expected words: "Body of Christ," and we would answer, "Amen." And though, as I say, I could not understand the gravity of this moment, I nonetheless had nothing but reverence every time.

And with our first Communion came our first confession, as Penance was to prepare us for union with the Lord.

It was true what they always say about the sacrament of Penance - one would feel as if a weight was lifted from his shoulders; one would feel pure and clean and free. And I usually merely had a list of seemingly negligible sins to recant to the priest behind the dark, mysterious screen, yet I always performed this ritual with due respect, and so received the promised blessings.

The discipline of these early sacraments, and my grade school experience as a whole, is something I now do treasure - now that what was learned by rote has become reality.

10

And all the time life went on. And all the time the Spirit spoke to me in the silence of my soul; all the time Wisdom was there. Yet always the temptations of the Evil One besought my attention, and managed to gain a foothold in my life by their illusion.

And I remember my grandfather died when I was nine years old. I remember feeling sorry for my mother. And I remember praying in the pews of the church for his soul and the soul of my uncle, who had died shortly before. I earnestly sought their quick release from the fires of purgatory.

And I remember the pages of many books and magazines: school books and library books, educational magazines with cartoons and games and comic magazines of different kinds, and even the backs of cereal boxes. I loved to read, for in it I found peace and tranquility. How fondly I remember the once-a-month arrival in the mail of the cardboard box that contained my new book, usually the treasured work of Dr. Seuss. Nothing could quite compare with the inner joy this would bring.

And I remember playing 'doctor' in my cellar with my friend and a girl on the block... as well as the proliferation of naked photos and pornographic magazines hidden here and there, as the dark shadow continued to eclipse my soul. Here was the source of so much later sin.

O Spirit, remain with me as I continue to tell of the struggle of my soul. And help me to make ever greater progress in my path to you.

PART THREE

1

The wheel. The wheel rolls on. Tricycles and matchbox cars and model soap box derby cars whittled from wood. Slot cars racing around on an electric track, sleds sliding down an icy surface, and our own family car. The wheel rolls on...

The spinning wheel spins (at the boardwalk and elsewhere) and we are caught up - going round and round and round in the circle of life. Like the barrel that spins in the fun house - sometimes we slip going through, and fall to our knees; sometimes we glide through; and sometimes we just enjoy the ride.

Yes, life goes on.

And I recall the posts of the guard rails whirring by as we crossed over bridges... they passed in a blur. (But if I concentrated and moved my head, I could see them individually.)

And on we go. Seemingly unstoppable, seemingly without pause, the wheel continues to spin - and we continue to roll.

My tricycle was green and my friend's was red. We would race down the block side by side. Sometimes he would win, sometimes I would win - I don't remember who was faster. I do remember my tricycle was taller than his, and I remember the bumps in the sidewalk we'd have to avoid.

Matchbox cars (so called because they came in tiny boxes) were an entertaining pastime. Every week or so I'd walk to *Two Guys* (a local department store) with an older friend of mine who lived next door to pick a new model. Fifteen blocks we'd walk before arriving at our treasured destination. And as we browsed in the aisles, and as we peered into the glass cases, we'd decide which model was the most desired...

And back home we'd stretch out the yellow track the cars would glide on. We'd have them rolling from great heights and conquering man-made obstacles of stacks of books or living room furniture. At the end they'd fly off the track.

The making of model soap box derby cars required the implementation of skills, and so it provided a challenge and required also the concentration of my attention and creative powers. My father was always there to help, but I did have the opportunity to use my own hands, and this made the sport mean that much more.

We won the first round of the local competition and moved on to a contest outside our immediate area. I recall watching several matches as I waited for my turn. The cars were let go from a steep incline and set rolling on the wooden track. It was exciting. I knew our standard car would not triumph against the high-tech models others here had conjured up, but just being part of the competition was indeed exciting nonetheless.

And then there were the slot cars we would race in the store near the YMCA. These were run by electricity and capable of great speed. The hands on, get down and do-it-yourself sense was missing from this venture. This was much more of an entertainment experience.

One of the most joyful experiences of childhood was riding our sleds in winter. There was a steep street just up from my house where we would gather to glide down the hill. But the most exciting slope was in a churchyard around the corner. It twisted and turned, and would often harden into ice - so we had to make good use of our steering bar.

I recall also, one winter after a severe snowstorm, my father built a huge fort of snow in our front yard - it was the most marvelous thing and greatly enhanced our snowball fights.

Finally, there was my father's own car, which throughout my childhood I remember as being a white Plymouth Fury. I believe he had three separate cars of this model, bought in succession. It

seems unusual, but I remember becoming quite attached to the family car. On one occasion, upon the trading in of one of these models, I recall my brother and sister and I hiding popsicle sticks in the seats as a remembrance of our presence there. It was difficult to say good-bye to the old car.

But we rolled on out of that lot in our new buggy, and soon were on the road again - the past being left beneath our wheels and the future stretching out on the road before us.

2

Records spin on old turntables and my brother and sister dance... They spin with their arms outstretched and heads bowed, as Christ upon the cross, as I lay on the bed and take in the music that fills our peaceful room.

The birth of my sister I remember quite clearly, though I was only five years old. In the car we waited for my mother as she came from the hospital carrying Lynn in her arms. As if it were yesterday, I remember looking at her and laughing with my brother that we thought she looked black. Still I can hear my mother's voice disagreeing and see the car seat in front of me. And just as clearly I recall the day she died, some fifteen years later, being again outside the hospital in the back seat of my parents' car, as my brother and godparents skipped away singing, "We are because we are because we are..." (Memory is a funny thing.)

My brother and sister were very close - they were as brother and sister. They would play together as well as dance together, and scratch one another's backs while sitting on the couch. (My sister's nickname was 'Pinhead,' and my brother would also tease her about her sloping shoulders, saying, "I've got a hunch.") I, even then, suffered the curse of artistic distance, always in my own world and looking at things dispassionately, at least to some degree. Though I know I enjoyed their presence, I never could live life quite as fully as they. Their ages being closer certainly helped them to better relate to one another, and my brother also always seemed to understand females well - something else I never have done.

In my most vivid memory of the three of us, my sister is playing teacher with my brother and me. I recall cringing behind a chair and looking in my brother's eyes, as my sister went on a tirade. We smiled and laughed in amazement at our sister's overwhelming authority and her strong ability to play.

My sister always served to keep my brother in line (acting more like an older sister than the baby) while I looked on dispassionately. Though the last time I saw her alive, she acted similarly toward me. We played a board game, and she beat the pants off of me. She had no mercy on my weakened, sinful state, and, when the game was over, wondered at my ineptitude.

There were many things we did together over our childhood years. Vacations were always a particularly special time. Long trips we'd take in the car, up and down the East Coast - the three of us in the back seat, our mother and father up front. Sometimes there'd be luggage in the back seat, if the trip was exceedingly long - as when we'd drive to Florida to visit my grandparents there - so my sister would sometimes be up front with my mother, falling asleep in her arms.

We'd often play games in the car in order to pass the time. We'd go through the alphabet, finding words (on signs) that began with each letter, one at a time. We'd see how many license plates of different states we could spot driving on the highway. And we always had various travel games we'd brought along or bought at any road stop.

It was good to stop and eat, and to stretch our legs. My father would always make jokes with the waitress, in a friendly way, and often there were special foods and candies when we were traveling in other states. I remember that one gas station gave a free box of candy with a fill-up of gas, so we'd continually look forward to when my father's car ran low, for the candy was indeed a special treat.

And then, when the day was done, we'd stop at the motel for the night. Sometimes we'd stop early, so we could go swimming before it got too dark.

There were always wonderful things to be seen at our destinations - ships and bridges and old-fashioned people and

towns - but I seem to remember the traveling most, for that is when we were most close.

3

O Lord, how far have I wandered from thy holy fold? How far have I strayed from the path set before me?

And as a people how far have we gone from the will of our Savior? To what degree have we polluted this earth which was placed in our care? How has the wheel we've devised crushed the life from our midst? And how shall we redeem ourselves and get back on the path to God?

We know not what we do. We grow older, we move along, barely sensing the sin we've become. The world enters in, there seems no defense - and so, on we go along the path that leads to our destruction.

The folly of youth begins early, in ways we do not recognize. We accept the ways presented to us with barely a question mark. Though there is a divinity which shapes our ends, and we are kept from corruption despite our surroundings - the temptations of our environment remain an obstacle that must be overcome.

And what is the folly of youth but to fall to those temptations. What is its sin but to long to be as one with that which glistens and beckons our pride, which calls us to enter into its snares - and to it how happily do we run.

But the folly of youth can be forgiven, for indeed it knows not what it may do. In the folly of our youth is an ignorance of the depth of our sin. And so often the sins we commit in early days we think are correct for our lives - lacking wisdom and clear discernment of things, we confuse truth and lie. So, going thus on limited information, and unable to distinguish right from wrong (for how often right is presented to us by those who are wrong), we err in ways we are not aware of, we sin without understanding its call.

Yet for all sin man is held accountable - our ignorance shall be a poor defense. The sufferings of purgation await us for all our indiscretions, thus need we teach the children well.

But on the world goes in ignorance, accepting the sins and perversions as ordinary. Unable to lift our voices to instruct those straying, we contribute to their inevitable demise.

The mores of the world enter in. The ideas of the dark one take their hold. And we accept them as fate; we condone the lies that are told.

And now growing older, now moving on into puberty... now beginning to find my way in this world - now the darkness would find a place in me.

4

In addition to the threat of being drafted to fight in war upon coming of age, another dark cloud hung ever above our heads, even as children - that of nuclear destruction. The phrase "the end of the world" was common to us from a very young age. And whether it came by war or by the will of God - for this was the more common interpretation of the cause of the end - it was as real as apple pie or a concrete block. To our minds, it could come at any time; God's power was a present force, and the possibility of Him employing that power to bring us to 'kingdom come' was certain.

The idea of the end of the world was not a fantasy - it was an every day supposition and suggestion of the inevitable. It was talked about by parents, teachers, relatives, and friends. It led to amusing applications in our lives, such as "Why should I do my homework over the weekend if the world might end on Monday?" (I also recall a conversation with my friend wherein we stated, in boyish ignorance, that if we knew the world was to end at a particular time or moment, we would take every opportunity to have sex with any girl before such an event could occur - showing again our predilection and preoccupation with the carnal desires - though we were far from doing anything of the sort.)

Thoughts and discussions of the end of the world did not provoke fear in me as a child - they never served to make me

anxious (as they would later in my sinful life). We were not afraid of the prospect of the end coming. We were not so rooted in the world yet to be fearful of its being taken away. The corruption of sin had not yet taken hold in our lives, its darkness had not begun to permeate our beings, so the coming of Light and the coming of truth were not potentially harrowing experiences. The world itself was still something of a fantasy, so the idea of losing it did not particularly disturb me.

It was not until I would be mired in sin, until I would become part of this world, that I would be anxious about losing it. As yet, the attachments I felt were still rather light and indefinite - though ever growing in intensity.

5

In puberty, the pubic hairs we'd see in magazines (though in the photograph from *Oh, Calcutta!* in *Time* magazine, the women had their pubic hairs shaved off) and find growing upon our own bodies, initially caused a kind of fascination, a wonder about the development of life and its changes. The 'dirtiness' they would soon connote and the lustfulness they would inevitably incite were here at first subordinate to, if not unknown by, the sense of apprehension at their newness. One was wont to say, at least in the mind, "Look at that!"

The human body always held this fascination for us as we grew. Whether we were rubbing hynees in the shower or showing one another our rearends around the corner, there was always an innocent marveling at the development of, and our perception of, our bodies. But now entering puberty, that perception became more serious - and more tainted.

Now as we edged our way to the pornography rack in the magazine store, or as we made our way to the twenty-five cent picture shows of nudie girls at the back of the penny arcade - there was indeed serious intent in our hearts, which beat with unnatural excitement at the prospect of beholding the naked female form.

With what purpose we sought every opportunity to fulfill our desire. How we made this cause our treasured call. Caught up

were we in the temptations of this world. Trapped were we by our own unholy fire.

And now we began to wear this lust more comfortably - it became as our own property. And heated and perverse words in books became my particular source of vice - in reading of fornication I took special delight. And my breath at this time, though low and restrained, burned within me with a hellish fire. And I took in all the words and images with nary a thought for their immoral nature.

As I say, it now became a part of me, this perverse pastime of the world. And it tainted the way I looked at the body of every girl. But in secret I kept my sin, hidden from the eyes of my family and the eyes of God - so I would think. Why I continued so, I do not know. I was unwaveringly drawn into its clutches, and accepted in ignorance its grip.

I remember that in seventh grade a student was caught with one of the pornographic novels that was circulating about, and the administration was rounding up all guilty parties. I had read a couple of these books and was fingered by a fellow student. I was called into the hallway (actually, to a stairwell) where a priest waited to interrogate me. A good friend of mine, who was not from such a happy family as I, stepped in before I could utter a sound and insisted that I was not involved. He knew how quiet and shy and ordinary I was, and how I would die if my parents found out - so he sought to save me from humiliation. And it worked. (It was a loyal thing he did, but I sometimes think it might have been better my parents knew - it may have prevented later falterings.)

By the time I was in my teens, I would put down these pursuits. I began to see pornography as childish and silly - as a stage that needed to be passed by. And though the lust remained aflame in my heart, it became softened by an aesthetic touch. I still desired to see the woman's naked body, but now with at least an excuse of it as an art form. Though far from ideal was my sense of beauty, I began to think along these lines. Ultimately, this only served to confuse love and lust further for me, art offering a disguise to immorality.

But there have been times when I have been able to see the human form with the artist's pure eye. However, these moments

would not withstand temptation. As with the foreign films I'd watch on public TV, presumably for the artistry - it was usually the nude scenes I'd be waiting for, though some of the beauty slipped into me.

This was in teen years of which I shall speak later on, for this was the time of other influences as well - influences which stemmed principally from the field of music and the popular culture in which I was bred. But for now let us leave it be said that as I began to come of age, the soil of the earth entered my skin and found a home for itself therein. And so there would grow the most unseemly of things - though there was a quiet that somehow remained within. And though it would be dimmed to darkness, gradually and imperceptibly, the light that was borne within me would carry me to the other side.

6

Mumps, measles, German measles, chicken pox - I suffered all the childhood diseases. And I got them all out of the way while I was still a child.

The pain of the mumps I remember the clearest. I woke in the middle of the night with a strange swelling ache inside my head near my ears. My father said I had the mumps. Here was a name as strange as the disease. (But it was good to have a name for my sickness.)

Of the chicken pox, all I remember is that my brother, my sister, and I all had them at the same time, so we were all off from school at the same time. I recall no pain associated with this disease because I simply enjoyed the free time I spent with my brother and sister. (We were able to catch up on our music listening.)

What I remember best about childhood sicknesses is that, whatever the ailment, I always felt better when my mother ran her fingers through my hair. (What is there like the comfort of a mother?)

My father always seemed to me something of a doctor - and a very wise doctor. He always seemed to know what was wrong. Though I would be worried and lost in travail, he was always calm.

When a friend had cut my finger with what he had said was a 'dull' razor, I came running up the block in fear. My father (almost with impatience) insisted I stop crying, and drove me to the hospital. And even when I was a young man approaching twenty and was up all night with a stomach cold, my father simply (almost magically) handed me a thermal vest of his, knowing it would heal my pain - and it did.

I was not a particularly sickly boy, evidenced by my very infrequent absences from school. (I couldn't bear to miss a day at school, thinking always that it was a day I would never get back.) But I do recall my share of colds and fevers.

Fevers left especially strong impressions upon my psyche. They caused what bordered on hallucinations. One vivid dream or vision was brought on by the nursery rhyme: "Fat and skinny had a race, all around the pillowcase. Fat fell down and broke his face, and skinny won the race." I would see Laurel-and-Hardy-type figures racing around the edges of my soft and malleable pillowcase, chasing one another in a kind of feverish slow motion... (This may be related to that nightmare in which you are running, as if in sand, but are unable to make any progress away from the unknown, invisible spectre that is pursuing you untiringly.)

Like the grotesque figures I'd find in the shapes and shadows of my curtains, these dreams as a child did not particularly frighten me. Again, it was more of a fascination I felt for the strange sensations that were coming upon me. And though they were certainly not desirable in themselves and were probably brought about by some satanic movement of the spheres - yet, since the evil of the disease failed to touch me, the otherworldly nature was all I knew. And, against the will and desire of malevolency, instead of running in fear from the spectre the devil created, I stopped and only saw that there was another realm than this one.

As I would grow older, the nightmares would come to hold sway in my psyche - when fallen into sin, this was an inevitable outcome - but even the endless pit into which I would feel myself dropping, I would escape in time. For even in the anxiousness of running aimlessly from my sin, Jesus was there. For it was He I was running from.

7

The devil really holds no sway. Never think he has any power. The only power is that which comes from the Light; only God holds power. God is all-powerful, and those who follow His ways partake of that power.

No power can come from darkness, and the devil is all darkness. Those in the darkness stumble blindly, grasping at phantoms or lashing out at the mist which surrounds them. They pretend. They presume knowledge, but they have it not. The only wisdom is born of love, and in darkness there is no love.

So, never think the devil or his servants know your soul - only God knows your soul. Only God sees you. You may fear Him, but know He is a forgiving God and wants only to see you whole. So call upon Him in your distress, seek Him and to do His will, abide in His Son most holy, and all else will fall away.

The devil is to be pitied for his anxious malevolency. And those who follow him are like men who stagger blind-folded through steaming pits of burning vapor. They are but lost. They have but abandoned hope: they know nothing.

So you who are of Light, know the Lord is with you and with your prayers. He cradles you in the palm of His hand. He who knows all, He who loves all, shall be with you till your dying day. And then you shall see so clearly how close He has been to you. Then your eyes shall be opened to the movement of His will.

Until then, know you have the power to cast out Satan and all his evil illusion. Know the children of the dark cannot overcome you, children of Light - against your love there is no defense.

8

Artistic sensibility began in me, I suppose, with the anointing by Wisdom and the coming of Christ's renewal into my life at Baptism. This is what drew me to create.

I remember various little examples of practicing art in my childhood - I recall the first poem I wrote , which, I think, was not

till I was thirteen or fourteen. Earlier than this, I recall trying to write each episode of the *Flintstones* I'd see in one line. (I remember discussing with my friend if I had it quite right. I'd done about thirty episodes succinctly.)

I have already mentioned a propensity and love for music and dancing - this was always simple and pure. I recall also having a primitive tape recorder and doing skits and assuming characters on tape with friends, most of a comic nature.

And I remember doing drawings with my sister wherein we would cover a sheet of paper with various crayon colors, then spread black over the rainbow it was. We would then make artworks by etching into the black to the color beneath.

There were various school projects - writings and drawings and coloring egg cartons red and green for Christmas. I remember well my seventh-grade English teacher, who would give us extensive spelling assignments - writing words three times each with whole definition and a sentence. She was very strict, but I learned a lot from her. This was marvelous training for my writing.

We'd also come up with other creative ideas as kids - putting together little carnivals for the younger children, inventing various games, building hockey nets from chicken wire and two-by-fours... and all this contributed to and was part of my creative background.

But, again, there was always music. Always I would listen to the radio or play records. I remember how mad my brother would get at me because I'd always fall asleep with the radio on. (We slept in the same room.)

And always there were books. Books to read and page through, books to study - words everywhere.

And always there was Jesus, whispering in my ear.

9

When we were children, the people next door had a pool in their yard, and my sister would be asked to swim there on a regular basis. She was best friends with the boy next door, and was a very amiable person. In fact, wherever she went she made friends with people, even while we were shopping in department stores. When

we'd go on vacations, she'd meet people from other countries, whom she'd write to upon returning home.

Living on the other side of us was an elderly lady who was known for her complaining and the car in front of her house which never moved. ("The statue' my father called it.) Her daughters lived with her, and there were two grandsons, one of whom was a friend of mine. The woman's mother even lived there for a time, but no adult man was around.

Downstairs lived my cousins and my aunt and uncle. One cousin was the same age as me, but, despite this - though we were good friends (in fact, it was he in whose arms I would cry at the funeral of my sister), he was closer to my brother - who is two years younger than I. The other two cousins were older than us, so we didn't see them all that much, but my aunt and uncle we knew. We shared a cellar together, which was the scene of several of our ventures - some innocent, others questionable.

We had others cousins (though not by blood) who lived across the street, and my best friend who was as my twin lived down the block from me. There were several boys who were my age who lived on the block as well, and all were friends of one sort or another throughout my childhood years.

Diagonally across from our house was the park where we would spend much of our time. It was the field for several sports; it offered us its open green.

Our grammar school, St. Paul of the Cross, was only a couple of blocks away, but there were two or three candy stores along our walk. 'Annie's' was our favorite one - there we'd buy our snacks for school. We came home for lunch every day; the mornings were longer than the afternoons.

I was a school crossing guard, and I had a white belt I'd strap around myself. When the cars were going by, we'd hold out our arms, to keep the school kids to one side. One day, at the block past the school, I remember a kid threatened me with a knife. The situation passed quickly, as he was simply showing off this prized possession of his.

Another time also I was threatened with a knife, by a three or four-year-old boy. A couple of kids had tied me to a tree and then

given the knife to the boy to swing around. I was a few blocks from my house at the time, but again the crises passed relatively quickly - though of both these places I'd be afraid for some time to come.

About four blocks up from my house was the main shopping district, known as Central Avenue. As we'd get older we'd venture there, to shoot arrows at the archery or buy something at the five and dime. When my parents were kids there were movie theaters there, but for this we had to go to Journal Square, which was a couple-mile bus ride away.

The first movie my friends and I were allowed to go and see by ourselves was *The Sound of Music*. I remember tickets were on sale for fifty cents. My cousin across the street and my friend next door were a couple of years older than the rest of us, so they served as some kind of chaperones. I was only eleven or twelve, and so able to get in for children's fare. But my cousin was tall and past the age, so, being the comic he was, he would squat down by bending his knees in, as he approached the ticket booth.

My cousin (not by blood) was indeed a comic boy. I remember one day he had this fake white hand, small and oddly-shaped, which he had tucked in his sleeve, and was pretending it was his own. He had everyone outside the school laughing out loud as we waited for the bell to ring. (They also had films at the school on Saturday afternoons, which I would attend with my cousins and friends as well.)

The neighborhood we lived in was filled with kids when we grew up. It was made up of working-class families, nearly all of whom were Catholic. Second generation European immigrants were the order of the day, mostly from Italy or Ireland, Poland or Germany. People of color were somewhat foreign, though a city which was as little Cuba was a virtual stone's throw away. (I didn't really know a black person well until I went to high school, and he struck me as the warmest person I'd ever met.)

Growing up I recall fondly - it is the most treasured time for me. And my sister's smile and wide eyes represent childhood fully.

During our last summer down the shore together - with my cousins and our families - I was thirteen years old. We had spent the previous ten Julys as one happy household, but now, though we didn't know it at the time, this would be our last summer together in the sun and salt-sea air. (It always seemed these summers would last forever - though we never stopped to think about it.)

During this our last summer, there was a large music festival starring three famous bands - two of which I was hearing about for the first time. During this our last summer, there would be something to come between my cousin and I and break the seemingly inseparable bond among my two cousins, my brother, and myself. During this our last summer, a girl would take precedence in all our lives.

During this our last summer, Beatle solo albums would assert themselves as significant. My cousin was a 'Beatlemaniac,' and he had taught me much about them over the years. I derived a love for their music and their lives from his love of them, and though they had been separate for a few years, it was only during these years that I became very familiar with them. But now not even this bond we shared could keep us together.

The attraction of this girl, Cindy, was telltale of the perversion of love that had come to pervade our thinking as a result of the pornography that had gripped our lives. It was her breasts that attracted us to her. The physical drew us, and we never stopped to ask why. And though she was a pleasant enough girl, it was lust that dominated our lives. (None of us actually had sex with her - though we foolishly thought this was imminent one night.)

And the other element of my confusion was also present, for I idealized this girl to the 'nth degree. I thought about her for a full year following that summer, and dreamed of riding my bike to her house (many, many miles away...) or walking to the shore the following year. (I would, in fact, see her some three years later, while visiting the shore with my friends. She was carrying a baby in her arms, a baby I could assume was her own - at age fifteen.)

During this last summer, there would be arguing and insults passed amongst us boys, and the discontinuation of traditional

affairs. No longer was crabbing important, or wiffle ball or fireworks or sitting on the hot sand - we grew apart as friends now. I would spend hours alone, enjoying the music of the solo Beatles on hot and lazy afternoons.

This was also the year my cousins downstairs moved to the suburbs. We were to move as well, but we ended up buying the house from them, and occupying it alone. Now my brother, my sister, and I each had a separate room - living on the first floor, well away from my parents' bedroom. (This would also be the year my mother would take a job, and not be home for us at lunchtime.)

Yes, this was a year of separation. Not only would we no longer visit the shore with my cousins the next summer, as we always had - but they, too, would move to the 'burbs and make it harder to visit them during the year. ("To every thing, turn, turn, turn...")

This was the end of my childhood and the beginning of my teen years. Here was a loss of innocence, and the pure joy of being alive. Now things would grow more complicated. Now, truly, the devil and his means would work their way into my life, and leave me quite defeated. Now the winding road to nowhere I would soon find myself upon, and with such eager anticipation - in foolishness I would seek its dark turns.

II

ADOLESCENCE

PART ONE

1

As I continue with the dark complication that becomes the teen years of my life and move toward the climax of my sinful state, I pray the Lord be with me, His Holy Spirit watch over me, and His angel, Wisdom, be my guide - that I might have understanding, that I may speak in truth and in light of the dark twists and turns my life would take.

I remember once - in the midst of my teen years, while high on marijuana - I was wandering the streets of the City alone. I came upon a secluded area where the narrow streets twisted and turned. I thought I had entered another place, another country or town. My mind was too dark with illusory wonder, my eyes were too blinded by the powers of the air (drugs are a prime tool of the devil), my sense of reality was too suspended to know the concrete beneath my feet was no different than any other I had ever tread upon. And so I didn't know that truly I was lost.

These are things of which I do not speak easily. These are things I would sooner forget. But exposed to the Light they shall be conquered, and I shall find the canceling of my debt.

I was still twelve years old when I made my Confirmation. This sacrament did not seem to leave a great impression upon me (though I believe the blessing was nonetheless there). It was not until many years later that I would begin to understand the Holy Spirit or come to know the ways in which He works in all our lives. (The Holy Spirit seems greatly to be the neglected member of the Trinity in the Catholic Church. Only through the Charismatic Renewal did I become aware of His importance and His presence.)

What I remember most about Confirmation is the white book (actually, folded cardboard paper) of seventy questions and answers we had to memorize as preparation for the sacrament. Each week the priest would come into class and drill us on the questions for that week, and each week the number we had to learn was increased. Finally, all seventy had to be memorized - it was quite an exercise.

Of course, when the day of Confirmation came, the bishop didn't ask any of these questions of us confirmees, though we had been led to believe he would. He was friendly and asked only general questions about the faith. I myself raised my hand to answer one of his queries (though I have no idea now what the question was or what I said in response).

I remember also my red robe, which I had to wear in procession with my classmates. My cousin (the elder one with whom we'd go down the shore) was my sponsor. He put his hand on my shoulder as the bishop put his hand on my head... it was very ceremonial. And I remember my father commenting in the car about the bishop's sermon. He said that even though he wasn't Catholic - only my mother is Catholic (they had to promise to raise me Catholic in order to be married by a Catholic priest, though they couldn't be married in the church itself but in the rectory) - he felt the bishop had made some good points. And he was disappointed that I couldn't seem to remember what the bishop said.

I suppose the memorization of the questions served as a means of training my soul and therefore signified a kind of confirmation. And I'm sure there was a blessing that came from the laying on of the bishop's hands. I regret I may have been too ignorant to

understand the event, but as I said earlier, things I learned by rote in my childhood (and then rebelled against) later became very real for me. And the anointing experience here in Confirmation would later bear fruit when I would come of age.

3

In the year following my Confirmation, I graduated from grammar school. I was thirteen and on the cusp of fourteen.

That final year of grammar school, my friend and I worked a paper route. We delivered papers every day but Sunday on a route that covered five blocks - our block being in the midst of them all.

We were excellent paper boys. I myself (and I think my friend, too) never needed to use the address cards we were given to remember anything. I had approximately fifty houses to cover and I had no difficulty remembering each house, any special instructions, and how many weeks each house owed. I kept it all in my head, and it was always at my beck and call. (I think this was an early sign of my trust in the Holy Spirit.) When my friend quit the route in the spring, the number of houses I had to remember must have been pushing one hundred, yet I still had no difficulty remembering all details.

My friend was shocked when I continued with the route after he had quit. It was the beginning of baseball season and try-outs were around the corner... But my mind had well begun to turn from sports. Music now held the treasured place in my life.

I had used most of the money I'd made on the paper route to bolster my record collection exponentially - I'd buy two or three albums a week. The walls in my new room now became papered with pictures of and from various rock bands and their albums, particularly the Beatles. I was fast becoming a Beatlemaniac, aware of all the trivial things about this band this breed is wont to know. I even collected their bootleg albums (besides having all their standard releases) and joined a fanzine that celebrated their genius.

For my graduation I received an electric guitar and amp as a gift from my parents - a gift I had requested - and I proceeded to spend the entire subsequent summer sequestered in my room

fiddling with it. A friend on the block offered some rudimentary instruction, but when he stated a price for continued education, I was put off (his calculated greed surprised and somewhat offended me) and continued my study alone.

I had a couple of books, but had little patience for the orthodoxy of their lessons, and so I mostly just played what sounded all right to my ear. But my efforts with the guitar would not be concerted and sustained. I would more often than not have a guitar over the years to come, but continued with little interest in the standard way of playing. This would cause me to think there was little hope for me and the guitar, until I would be twenty-two and the subject of conversion. Then I would decide to play it as I heard it - with faith and concerted effort.

4

Peace. The peace sign. It's funny how the devil works. It was peace signs flashed by the figure on the cover of one of their albums that led me to the music of Black Sabbath. And listening to them sing so sweetly about the benefits of marijuana touched off a desire for drugs in me.

John Lennon was also a man of peace, at least, so it seemed... (Oh how the mind of foolish youth can be so blinded by false illusion.) This is the problem with idols we create by the illusion of media - we blow out of proportion their talents and skills; we make larger than life their image... We no longer see a human being, we no longer are able to realize their faults and see them for who they really are - we see only some devised picture of what they are made to be.

And the teenage mind is so easily led astray by these false pretenses; it is so easily fooled by what seems attractive. Too young to see beyond the surface of things, we get easily lost in the illusion. And so the merest mention of religion or God I thought to be a positive thing - in love with the Lord as I was. Unable to distinguish the cast it was in, even the darkest presentation of the Deity I thought was 'cool.'

Yes, the devil works in subtle ways - which I as a teenager could not see. Realizing the world to be an evil place, seeing the corruption of greed and lies in the powers that be, I actually thought myself to be doing right by breaking the world's laws. If the world is evil, then rebelling against the world must be good - and so I justified the doing of drugs.

Later, such logic would lead me away from the Catholic Church, after seeing the hypocrisy there. It was not until much later that I would learn not to judge, that I would learn that the priests who were put on a pedestal since my youth were only human after all. It was only much later that I would grow up, that I would mature - something I'm afraid many people never do. It was only much later my mind would be able to clearly discern right from wrong, and the subtle distinctions between the two.

But for now the struggle was commencing; the dark period was being entered into.

5

My first year of high school passed relatively unceremoniously. It was a new place with new people and new things to learn, but I believe it served mainly as a prelude for things to come.

Though it does seem uneventful to my mind, in reality deep drifts were beginning to show. Somewhat insidiously, I was beginning to move away from the roots and precepts of my life. My old friends seemed to lose my interest, and the new friends I met at this new place seemed to hold much more prospect for coolness - I began to look to them and be guided by their ideas and actions, which were in turn guided by equally illusory ideas that had their origin, finally, in falsehood. The glimmer of truth that held me so fast to the lies that were becoming part of my life was that I was finding expression for things in myself that I had held back; I was finding a release and freedom in finding souls similar to myself. But the path we'd walk down was marred so much by inherent sinfulness that it became quite pointless, and ended in utter distraction from the path of the truth I was fooled into thinking I was on.

Yes, during this year I was looking longingly at the pop culture of rock 'n' roll and all the elements it upholds - the allure of drugs, the promise of popularity, the allegiance to vain idols constructed by the power of the mass media - radio, television, and magazines. I became quite enthralled by the stories of all these stars I'd diligently read about in the trade publications, and I dreamed of being like them, of having their popularity, money, and glory - of being a rock 'n' roll star.

Of course, being an artist, my dream was tinged with humanitarian aims of educating and inspiring the people, but it was no less prideful and vain. And I saw in those at school who actually played instruments well and performed in bands something to be desired, something about which I was held in awe and to which I aspired. And so I was drawn by their influence.

Gone was any desire for wholesomeness and the regular, average life I'd led to these days. I now looked to become someone else, and that someone else would continually change. My head was so filled with images that would vie for control of my soul, and I would find myself defined by the star I was following at that time. (When I was a Neil Young fan, I went so far as to wear pants virtually filled with patches, like the ones on his famous album cover.) And it was especially the older kids in the neighborhood who would influence my decisions and desires, wanting as I did to be mature as they and show the refinement of my taste for what was cool.

And so, my freshman year of high school proved to be a transition year, from the innocence and wholesomeness of my childhood - including my family, friends, and the culture of these people - to the experience of my teen years, wherein I would indeed experiment with a number of unwholesome things. It was a year in which my head was turning from the security and trust I'd known my life through, to that which only seemed to hold truth, but, in reality, was vast illusion.

Yes, rebelliousness finds its place well set in the years of adolescence, in that time when into the world we begin to come, in the world we begin to be, and we see the evil that is there. Unexpectedly, we find that the laws and voices of the laws which spoke above our heads for so long were not as perfect or powerful or true as they seemed. And upon first discovering this to be the case, what can the unskilled soul do but rebel.

And one can hardly blame him who rebels against that which is evil; his intentions are indeed to be lauded. The fact that he lacks the intelligence or maturity to see the evil of his own actions may be held against him, but this foolishness does not entirely preclude the desire for truth he pursues with his heart. And in this society where education is so lacking and the wise words of the elders are silenced by their separation from the mainstream, where they are no longer present in the houses but relegated to the nursing homes... in this place where ignorance and disrespect are wrought into the fabric of life, what more can we expect from the youth than heady and heedless rebellion. For want of guidance the mindless revolution goes on...

I had sensed the corruption of the world as I grew up, but now that I was becoming part of that world, I took it more to heart. The distance from vice I'd maintained in childhood was disappearing as I became a young adult. I now took the responsibility to criticize it where I'd see it... and I now - in ways I'd be blind to - through my passions and the appeasement thereof, began to live corruption in my own life.

When we are wrought by sin ourselves, we become passionately possessed in our judgment of others' sin. The hatred we feel toward others, the anger that destroys our souls, is born of the darkness inside ourselves, is fueled by our attachment to the things of this world. It is the evil in our own members that creates the wars between ourselves, and the only way to free ourselves from this bondage to the world of sin, is to - as Christ has told us clearly - turn and become as children once again. Only by rediscovering distance from the things of this earth will we

rediscover the fruits of heaven and be able to transcend the cycle of hatred and violence that characterizes this world we're in.

Turn the other cheek and lay down your life - love your enemy and you will find truth.

7

It was in my sophomore year of high school that everything changed. I had always been a quiet and shy boy, if not a little nerdy, but now I would take it upon myself to assert an identity for myself amongst my peers - for the worse.

I had a musical friend in school to whom I'd gotten close. He smoked pot regularly, and one day he finally asked me if I got high. I assured him I did and accepted his offer to buy a nickel bag. I remember taking it from him. I remember thinking it was beat because it was brown and not green. I remember clandestinely rolling a joint in my cellar - I held the papers the wrong way, so it was half the size it should have been. And I remember walking to the park late at night, sitting all alone by the playground, and attempting to smoke the joint. I was not terribly successful, and I couldn't really say I got high - mostly just a little smoky.

I remember the impetus for my starting with drugs was the fact that my mother would rag on me for all the 'trouble' I caused her. I was still a relatively good kid; there were many others I saw who were real trouble. And so I said to myself, "If she wants trouble, I'll show her trouble." And I gave myself over to the sinfulness of drugs.

I remember how hurt my childhood friend (who went to the same high school as me) was when I stopped spending time with him at school. And I remember how offended he was that I never told him I was smoking pot. But I didn't want to be responsible for turning him on to drugs. I kept this from all my childhood friends, and especially my brother, because I did not want them to be part of this milieu. Of course, it was not too long after that they would begin to experiment with drugs and alcohol, but I never would provide them means to such an end.

And so I became increasingly alienated from the friends with whom I'd grown up. (I remember clearly the relief I felt when I finally confessed my involvement with marijuana to one of my friends late one night on his porch. This was another reason my childhood friend would be upset with me - that I didn't tell him first.) We began to live in different worlds and travel in different streams. My friend would leave our high school during sophomore year - and things would not be the same with us for quite some time.

The subsequent summer I would reveal to the other kids in the neighborhood - the street kids, most of whom came from broken homes - that I smoked pot, and began to hang out with them. In absolute foolishness, and in an attempt to be so cool, I turned my back on my friends who were like family and began to run with friends who were like enemies.

I remember the night. We'd just finished playing wiffle ball against them, and I lingered behind as my friends walked toward home. Despite their calls to come along, I remained near the wall where a few kids were hanging out. When I told them of my experience and took out a joint, they were duly surprised - and now I bore the emblem which should have been of shame but was here a source of pride.

"Where would I be without my reefer?"

8

Soon I was getting high virtually all the time - on the way to school, in school, after school, at night... and soon my experimentation would extend beyond marijuana.

On the way to school, I would smoke a joint as I rode my bicycle. In school, we would get high in a small graveyard nearby. After school, I might go to a friend's house. And at night, sometimes I would smoke alone... And it was not long before I would find myself dropping a hit of mescaline or LSD each weekend.

And soon I would go beyond just doing drugs to dealing drugs. I would sell big joints of marijuana and pieces of hashish I would

get from a friend of a friend (though I would only sell to people I knew and never to kids - though I myself was but a kid). I suppose I helped support my habit by dealing. Though I never made money in the deals, I was able to keep myself fixed with drugs.

On the road of drugs I stopped short only of heroine - I never could imagine sticking a needle into my body. I was involved steadily and regularly with drugs for a 'good' three years, and I would smoke during periods of time after that. But I was through with drugs by the time I was twenty-two, and I would only have one fall with alcohol after that.

Perhaps the most grievous experience I had with drugs occurred one summer afternoon when several of us went over the hill (between Jersey City and Hoboken) and snorted something we called 'crystal THC': this was the one time I recall genuinely losing the ability to control my mind and soul.

After stumbling blindly back up the hill, my neighborhood friend and I ambled into my house to find some peace. We sat by the window, taking in air; we drank iced tea I'd gotten from upstairs - but we were unsuccessful in our search for composure. So we stumbled back outside, and I recall meeting up with a couple of other friends and lying on the grass in the park, trying to catch our breath and control our minds.

My most serious regret about this experience is that my sister was home at the time and must have witnessed what I went through in a dark cloud. No one else was in the house, but she was in her room, which was next to mine - she did, in fact, ask me if I was all right at one point. (Forgive me my sins, O Lord!)

This period with drugs I remember with great regret; I believe it was the reason for great sin in my life. I believe it did much damage to my body and my mind, and it served to deceive my soul and lead it into grave error. I genuinely wish I'd never done it. Though at the time I seemed to enjoy it very much, this was only because I was not aware of the gradual deception that took place in my life. I did not notice the steps into sin I'd taken, and so fooled myself into thinking all was well with the pleasure I found therein.

I would dissuade anyone from the taking of drugs - it is harming you in ways of which you know not, and when you face

up to its insidiousness, it will attack you with its paranoia. Stay clean. Stay clean, but don't condemn those who dirty themselves along the way, and you will have mastered the wiles of this world.

Peace.

9

Rock concerts were a big part of the culture into which I'd fallen. I went to see my first one (Paul McCartney) at age sixteen with my cousin from down the shore. At the concert we shared our marijuana with one another. It's funny how he who had gone away to the suburbs and I who'd remained in the city both managed to end up in the same place - grasping after some phantom of pride wrapped between rolling papers, and seeking after a distant figure the size of our thumbs (though through the binoculars McCartney looked as he would on TV).

In a three-year period I must have attended twenty or thirty concerts at various venues, including Madison Square Garden and the old Palladium, and I would see my record collection balloon to some two hundred albums. There was a record store in an old basement in downtown New York City (now the store covers the better part of a city block) that sold used records for two or three dollars apiece. Another musical/marijuana friend with whom I went to high school and I would go there regularly and squeeze our way through the wall-to-wall people to the back of the narrow shop where the discount records resided. (Before or after going there we'd stop in an old churchyard/graveyard along the way and smoke a joint or a bowl of hashish.)

It was this same friend with whom I would go to many of the concerts and with whom I would hang out after school in his basement bedroom and get high. I became rather close friends with him, and there were one or two other friends at school I grew to know fairly well - people with whom I'd get high. (The friend I had in sophomore year who'd turned me on to drugs left after that year, so I didn't see much of him.)

This friend and I would also frequently go to Greenwich Village on Saturday afternoons. We would, of course, get high, but

we would also check out the musicians and magicians, etc. in Washington Square Park and eat Souvlaki sandwiches in a small restaurant nearby... And we would just wander around.

I suppose friends are the important part of almost any teenager's life, and I was no exception. My life was built around my new friends - at school, in the neighborhood, and elsewhere as well. I had friends and groups of friends throughout the city, some of whom had fighting feuds with one another... thus leaving me in the middle. (But I have always been a kind of peacemaker, in any situation I find myself.) Friends are the measure of status and prestige for young kids making their way into the world; so often teens are indeed measured by and measure themselves by the company they keep.

The friendships I had in my teen years were almost exclusively centered around the appreciation of music and the doing of drugs - little else mattered to us. And though I did know most of the students in my high school class, and I got along with everyone, the only ones with whom I spent time outside school were those who met the above criteria. Together we'd dream of the rock 'n' roll life.

Yet, throughout all this time I remained a good student, making the honor roll virtually every time - partly because my parents would reward me financially for such a feat (and I needed the money which came six or eight times a year - with our new modular schedules - to support my habits), but mostly because I've always been a responsible person who conscientiously executes any task he undertakes, any job he must do. I have always done the work required of me (despite what many would say at a later period of my life).

And always through this time, although being ruled to some degree by the pressure of peers, I found a good deal of time to be alone. And in this time I would draw. And in this time I would write. And in this time I would take time to think and maintain the quietness inside. Though my soul was being polluted in ways I was not aware, yet I held a certain clarity of mind - for Wisdom never abandoned me, despite my being led astray.

Perhaps the worst feeling in the world is not being able to look someone in the eye.

During these drug-laden years I would come in to the dinner table, keep my head down to my plate, and eat. I would not look up at my family; I would barely utter a word. It was an absolutely dreadful way to be. And when I was finished eating, I would get up and leave.

I couldn't look anyone in the eye. I couldn't face up to what I was doing. I simply wanted to hide... And to hide is to be in hell, and I'm afraid this is the place I'd come to dwell - know it or not. When you have to hide things from those who love you, when you have to live a lie, it is the most pitiful and repugnant existence. No light shines in the mind which hides itself in the darkness of deception. For those who would hide their faces from the light of day, what hope is there?

One evening I was brought into the police station by a local officer for possessing rolling papers and being with a friend who was drinking. My father had to come to the station to pick us up, and it was then my secret became exposed to the light.

My mother was delirious when I got home - so shocked and upset was she. She ranted on in disbelief and asked me what I would think if my little sister were picked up by the cops. I did my unlevel best to calm her down and assure her things were not that bad, but my words lacked stability. (I remember another time, my mother looked into my eyes and somehow caught a glimpse of me in my intoxicated state. She began to exclaim something about my being on drugs. I recall the horror on her face. That time I succeeded in calming her down and (falsely) assuring her she was mistaken.)

My mother knew in her heart that something was amiss with me; I think my father was well aware in his mind. I remember one day, after having found marijuana in my room and discovered some writings I'd done while high on LSD, he spoke to me quite pointedly. He told me very simply and without passion that I was lying, and I was in danger of losing myself in the walls I was building. He was never more right. But he never seemed to get angry or upset with me.

I would continue my habits after these incidents - it sometimes takes awhile to learn your lesson - for I was still bursting at the seams with a desire to break free from the confinement of my room and home, from the perceived stagnation of my life. And I still never believed very deeply that what I did was terribly wrong. Yet I continued to rebel against hypocrisy and what I saw as ignorance (though I was the ignorant ass).

In time all would pass as water beneath the bridge. In time all would come around and be set aright again. But not without a great deal of pain, and not without great loss of life and love...

Heaven, mend our lives so cleft in twain.

PART TWO

1

When I was a child, sharing a bedroom upstairs with my brother, I could look through my back window and see the Empire State Building. That window, when I was even younger, was at the end of a narrow 'room' my mother used for doing laundry and hanging it out to dry. The wall which was later torn down to expand the size of the bedroom was covered with a blue painting my father had done of a spaceship, stars, and the moon. After I'd grown up and the room had become my parents' bedroom (when we the children moved downstairs), I remember looking out that second-floor window to the bushes beneath and saying to my mother (as she hung out the laundry to dry) that I bet I could jump out the window and land safely in the bushes. I remember clearly my sister, who was standing by, smiling widely and encouraging me to do so. My mother, of course, knew it was a crazy idea, but seemed amused nonetheless...

I had many good teachers in high school, and I learned quite a bit. I was particularly taken by my literature classes - here my love for words really began to blossom.

One teacher would get very emotionally excited by the stories we'd read, and, later on, another teacher I had would virtually act out in front of the room the plays that we studied. A love of poetry was bred in me and fostered by a pair of poetry classes I had. In one class, the book actually had the text of my favorite Beatle song, "A Day in the Life," presented as the words of a poem. And in the other class, the teacher brought us to the brother's house (the all-boys' school was run principally by the Christian Brothers) and taught us means of meditation. My biology teacher also introduced meditation to us, and what I learned I would later employ. I recall one experience, while on a vacation in Florida, of laying in bed and feeling my soul rise above my body and hover there... and my eyes were wide open.

I also had art classes in high school in which I would experiment with different media and methods of creating, and I had several philosophy and theology classes which began to get my mind thinking. Even the math and business classes were engaging to me, though I had little interest in either subject.

The students in our school were given some responsibility for choosing classes and creating their schedules. The schedules were constructed of fifteen-minute modules, and most classes consisted of three mods. A week was made up of five 'days' (Days 1-5, not Mon.-Fri.) which would carry over as necessary from one week to another. This sometimes made it difficult to keep track of the days (particularly when you're getting stoned in school), because each day had a different schedule. So, for years later I would have nightmares of being unable to recall the day and missing important classes (as well as of standing at my locker and forgetting the combination).

I recall having difficulty with only one of my teachers - a female French teacher to whom I was disrespectful, perhaps because of sexual tension. There was another female (math) teacher who only had a short stay, but of whom all the boys were in awe because of her beautiful body. The history teachers generally were easy-going, often bordering on negligent.

The school was well-run and deserving of accolades. Even our basketball team, which I followed closely my freshman year, was excellent - winning the state championship with two players who would later go on to the pros. So, despite my often wayward actions, I was receiving a good education.

2

Yes, the teens is a rebellious age - a particularly protestant time.

In a writing assignment one of the religion teachers gave us, we had to imagine a conversation between Jesus and the Pope. I depicted Jesus chastising the Pope for assuming infallibility and the ability to speak for Him. (At this time I had no understanding that Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter, and so to his

successors.) Toward the end of my teens, I would stop attending Mass, and I would not think to return till my early twenties.

I was indeed becoming frustrated with the twelve years of Catholic education I experienced. I remember few instances of corporal punishment throughout these years (post Vatican II as they were), and only once did I suffer this myself: in second grade Mrs. Walsh whacked my hand with the ruler. (She also had me write "obedience" a hundred times on several occasions.) But it was glorious to get out of the uniform I had to wear the first eight years... I was particularly glad to get rid of the tie which seemed to choke me. And now toward the end of my high school experience, I was looking for a complete change of structure and scenery. In my last two years I'd grow tired of the system of education in general - and I longed to leave Jersey City as well.

So, when I walked into the guidance office in junior year to research potential colleges, it was on my mind to go away from home and to find a place that was different. The only other place I'd been was Sarasota, Florida (where my grandparents had lived for some ten years), so I began to look in that area. I found a school that was in that same town, and decided to visit there with my parents that summer.

The campus immediately felt quite right, and when the counselor came out wearing flip-flops on his feet, I knew this was the place for me. As he showed us around, I had no doubt that I would be returning there next year, and the pretty girls who were walking around in bathing suits did nothing to deter my will. And though I would not receive my acceptance letter from this unorthodox institution until Christmastime, my heart from that moment and all through senior year was set on being at New College.

New College was the only school to which I applied; if I was not accepted there, I would not have gone to college, for as I say, my patience for schooling had worn thin. But here was an alternative. Here was a school that was not a school. Here was a place you could do as you pleased, and everyone would see your genius. And though I would nearly be thrown out my freshmen year for taking this thought to the extreme, I soon would learn the manner of self-discipline and independent study required. And so I

would release my soul from fetters, and so breathe so freely. But yet I would lose an essential part of me - I would fail to maintain any humility.

My last year of high school I would spend even more alone; nightly I'd walk through the park - the stray dogs and I. For I could think of nothing else but running away from home to the place my heart was set upon. My habits continued as before, and my schooling seemed to reach a new level (having had greater freedom in choosing my classes I now enjoyed them all the more), but though I would grow in mind and blossom with artistic talent in this my senior year, yet my sights were set on that which lay before me, which was far away from here.

3

There was a carnival in the park that night. I was walking around with my childhood friends. It was the eve of my seventeenth birthday.

I saw a girl in the arcade I had met once before while sitting in the park with a friend. (She also was with a friend that night.) She had sandy-blond hair and tight jeans and a tight blouse - she was very attractive. I left my friends (this leaving they could understand) and approached her. She was very receptive, so we walked around and talked together.

Toward the end of the night, we went off to the side and sat on some steps to talk alone. (I remember she told me "Paperback Writer" was her favorite song.) Before long, the carnival had closed and the people had cleared out of the park; only the alcoholics were left, lingering about in their second (or in some cases, first) home.

After midnight had passed, I remember revealing that it was now my birthday. The alcoholics, led by 'Joe Juice,' goaded the girl to give me a birthday kiss. She did. It was my first kiss. The way her tongue explored the inside of my mouth, I knew it was not her first.

We soon got up from there and walked along through the park. She put her hand in my back pocket and put mine in hers; I felt quite comfortable and at home. We kissed by the water fountain

and while sitting by the swing park... We kissed on and off for an hour or more. Then I walked her home.

I would not see her again for a few weeks, though I did return to the carnival the next night. I would see her on and off over the coming year or so, and visit her apartment several times. She lived with her mother, who was an alcoholic, and her little brother - whom the mother would beat till he was purple in the face. I spent some time alone with her in her bedroom, where I am sure she would have been willing to have sex with me, if only I knew what to do. Our relationship was limited to kisses.

She had a boyfriend who was a biker, though their relationship seemed somewhat rocky. He never seemed to mind my hanging around her. The last I saw her was on my first trip home from college - I gave her a Bible for Christmas and sat with her and her mother awhile. (A few years later, I ran into her brother. He didn't know who I was, but I judged by our conversation - and his appearance - that things were better at home.)

I had one or two other girlfriends before I went away to college - one I had met one weekend down the shore. She was kind enough to share her marijuana and her bed with me, so I stayed a day or two. That relationship consisted of little more than kissing, too. When I returned to the shore the following weekend, hoping to continue what was started, she told me she'd made previous plans, not knowing I was coming.

The other relationship I had was more substantial; it was ongoing during my final summer before college. Her I would see rather regularly, and the intimacy would progress a little further - though no virginity was lost.

I am quite sure she had lost her virginity a number of years before, since most of my neighborhood friends seemed to know her fairly well and had several tales to tell. But I enjoyed her company. I spent a weekend down the shore with her, finding some people who lent us their bed for a night (though again, no sexual acts were consummated).

We hitchhiked back from the shore the next day, and soon I would be going to Florida. I wrote her a couple of times from there, but she did not appreciate my creative (insane?) letters, and soon I

would cease communication. I did not see her much when I'd return home.

These encounters with women, though generally simple enough, were but a preamble to the sin I'd know upon arriving at my alma mater.

4

My high school graduation was not terribly eventful. (I ranked in the top ten percent of my class. My SAT score was 1190 - 600 verbal, 590 math.) I didn't attend my prom, didn't purchase my class ring, etc. - though I did buy the yearbook, and got a lot of signatures (some of which my mother did not appreciate). The night of graduation we got stoned, drove around New York City, had a minor accident with a stop sign in the wee hours of the morning... and went home with our tails between our legs.

During the summer before leaving for school, I took a job as a dock worker, loading and unloading trucks. It was a dirty job. It was hot and sweaty and the area was ridden with mosquitoes. There was a man who lived in a shack near the gates and served as security guard or gatekeeper. His clothes were beyond filthy and he absolutely never showered. (I remember that when you walked outside by the trucks, you trudged through oil slicks.) I would return there, briefly, the next summer and write a poem called "What It's Like To Be In Hell."

I worked at night with a friend of mine who got the job at the same time. We worked from 7 p.m. till at least 4 a.m. Once we worked straight through till 11 a.m., and as we were walking along Tonnele Avenue, the highway in Jersey City which is home to trucks, my father, who usually drove us to work, picked us up in his Wonder Bread truck and took us home.

(I remember when we were kids, my father used to give us rides around the block in his truck. You couldn't sit down; there was no other seat but his stool-like chair. The smell of fresh bread was marvelous... And I remember, too, my first visit home from college. My father took me - with urgency and enthusiasm unusual for him - immediately from the airport to the main stops along his

route. He showed me his work. This was most welcomed by me, as I often sought such moments of openness and intimacy.)

I like to think the discipline and hard work I displayed at this my first real job later served as a model for my studies at school (once I'd gotten my head on (semi-) straight). But I certainly was not sorry to leave it.

That last summer before college I also stopped going to Mass. My logic in doing this - as I would explain to my mother - was that I would not be going to Mass once I got to school, so I might as well not go now. I meant this in all simple seriousness. How I came to the conclusion I would not be going to Mass at college I don't know, though it seemed to me perfectly obvious that this was so. I had more specific excuses for stopping - disgruntled and disappointed as I was by the alcoholism and homosexuality I saw in the priesthood, and by the expensive cars I saw the religious driving - but generally it just seemed perfectly natural to do so. (This from someone who, as a boy, fretted so terribly about missing Mass while on the road home from Florida with his family.)

I was on the verge of a new experience in my life - a change of life I had long anticipated - and I was readying myself for such a time (dreadful though it would ultimately be).

5

There is a time in our lives when all things come to a head. I was fast approaching the climax of my life as I entered New College.

Toward the end of the summer, I drove down to Florida with my family and all my gear in tow. We spent a vacation at the resort on the beach in Sarasota where we had gone two or three times before. It was during this time that one monumental event occurred in my life.

One night I went out hitchhiking along the beach road with only one intent in mind - and my resolve would bring the desired result. I was determined to find a girl and determined to lose my virginity, and I would get my wish.

I was not hitchhiking long when a girl, maybe seventeen years old, picked me up in a big, expensive car. She asked me if I wanted to get a six-pack of beer, to which I agreed and which she bought. She then drove me back to her family's house.

The house was rather like a mansion, with a very large game room, a pool, etc. We played a game of pool, a game of shuffleboard, and then a game of cards. No one else was home. During the card game, she teased me into chasing her around the room and around the house. I cornered her in a closet and playfully told her I was going to do naughty things to her. She presently took my hand and led me to her bedroom. (Wisdom, teach me how I might express the things that happen here and in the coming pages.)

We were in her bedroom for a short while when her older brother came home. So we put on our clothes and went outside by the pool and conversed with him awhile. (He did not find my presence there at all suspicious.)

Shortly thereafter, she suggested we go for a drive again. We did, and she took me to a secluded place near a little beach. After a short time in her back seat, I suggested we leave the car. I walked naked from the car with her, she lay down in the weeds nearby, I lay down on top of her - and there lost my virginity. (She requested I not ejaculate within her, and I obliged.)

I must say the feeling was quite wonderful, though the situation was in no way right. (If only we could learn to do things right, what genuine joy we could know.) The experience gave me a sense of power, false though it was, that I could do as I pleased - I was not afraid of my parents' discipline anymore.

I remember when she dropped me off that night, she simply said to enjoy college. She then drove off, and I never saw her again. It was as if this experience was meant to introduce me to the hedonism I would soon know at school.

Soon enough my parents would leave me at my grandparents' house - the next day I was to start school - and return to New Jersey with my brother and sister. That night my grandfather would send me off to my room at an early hour as he went off to bed. I felt stifled and stuck and dreamed about a girl whom I'd met at the

vacation complex and to whom I was most attracted. This would be the first time I ever ejaculated. (God forgive me.)

The next day I was off to school early. My grandfather drove me the half-hour ride and was a much better driver than my parents had said. Once there, he tried to keep my guitar in the car, but I told him I didn't really play it anyway, so it wouldn't be a distraction. Then I shook his hand and walked away - and he was gone. And I was treading upon the campus.

6

“To Carthage then I came...”

In the rarefied air of New College I would live for the next four years. Now I had escaped my family and friends and culture completely, and I was free to do as I pleased on this tiny academic island in southern Florida.

And even as I would walk with my bags through the court in the midst of the dorms, older students would call to me from a balcony - “There goes Bruce Springsteen” (a popular recording artist from my home state). And I would join them in smoking a joint. And even as I waited in line to receive my dorm assignment, I would meet she who would become my first girlfriend.

I settled into my tiny room in the communal dorm on the flip side of campus, and then would spend the day at the beach with two other girls I had met. That night I spent time with one of these girls, and it looked as though we would become a couple. But the very next night I found myself on the beach with the girl I had met on line the previous day, the girl I would virtually live with for the next couple of months. (Even that night, and every night thereafter, we would sleep together - though she'd said she had a boyfriend back home.)

So, it did not take long for me to become acclimated to my new environment. In no time at all I had found the principal players in the drug culture, met a girl, and gotten in good with the elder students of the college.

My first term at school was an intensely lived blur of sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. Parties were frequent and late into nights, and with my roommate (to whom I'd changed after being assigned one who did no drugs and played board games... who simply was not cool as I had become), I learned to dance like a wild man under the stars and the green palm trees.

I did little work that first term - except for papers scribbled just before class - thinking it was not necessary in this environment of total freedom. (Soon I would learn the error of this thinking.) And so I would have to make up most of my work - one class in an eight-hour writing marathon on the subject of coming of age - after the end of the trimester. (At that time, the school year was broken into three ten-week terms and one independent study period.)

It was not long before I would begin to experience burgeoning insanity. Rarely would I venture off the campus - a walk across the street to the gas station to fill my bicycle tires with air was a major adventure for me - and the same students' faces I would see every day. (The school had only about 350 students.) But the worst blow to my sanity would come when my girlfriend's hometown beau arrived for an extended stay. I told her I would leave her to him, but she continually returned to me. So I found myself in the unbearable position of having a woman who was between two men and thinking she could balance them both.

It would take some weeks to resolve this dilemma, which would exacerbate suicidal tendencies I had already developed from my drug addiction. But I managed to keep myself from stepping off the dock of existence (thinking how it would hurt my mother), though I was sorely tempted by the devil to throw myself upon the rocks of despair.

Once I had freed myself from this girlfriend, I did not turn around or change my ways, but only fell deeper into debauchery, sleeping with four or five different girls in the span of one month (two in the course of one particularly drunken night). When one left, I went to another - generally being seduced by them, but offering no resistance. The horror of this iniquity would hit me hard on my first trip home from New Jersey.

I came home for Christmas that year (as I would each year) after my extreme exercise in freedom. My hair had grown long, my beard had grown out - I was every inch a 'hippie.' But the event that marked this time was my first step to conversion.

I was in the station on the down escalator, heading for the Path train to New York City, when I was approached by a man with a mission. He started to talk about Jesus' love, and he seemed sincere, so I listened and spoke with him. He invited me to a prayer meeting that night, and I took his name and number and the address of the gathering. I then caught my train and did my Christmas shopping on Times Square.

I decided to take my friend up on his offer and visit his meeting that night; it was a bus ride away from my house. It was Christmas Eve and the rains that night bordered on torrential, but I took my umbrella - which was rather ineffective - and headed out the door.

At the meeting place, there were only a few people in attendance, including a young couple who said the Lord had helped them to find a house and a young man with alcohol on his breath, who took care of the place. But we had a substantial meeting, talking about the Bible and the message of Christ. The stirring moment of the night came when we all knelt on the floor together to pray - each offering his life to God. As I lifted my head from being bowed to the floor, I had a vision of the roof opening up and light coming pouring in.

It had gotten quite late, so they drove me home, and we talked about being born again. I was very excited and anxious to be so. They weren't quite sure I was ready yet and thought to calm me down. (I recall suggesting they stop in front of a bar near my house, a symbol of my iniquity, so I could kneel down in front of it and repent my life of sin.) They informed me I would have to change - I would have to give up drugs and sexual relations. I took this idea with some hesitation, but was convinced that they were right.

When I finally arrived at my house, sometime well after midnight, my father met me at the door, distinctly angry. He even pushed me with violence (the only time I can ever remember him doing so). He said he was upset because my mother had been

waiting all night for me to come home so we could spend Christmas Eve together. I was simply surprised by his actions and puzzled by his reasons. (We never were a family that stood much on the ceremony of holidays.) I apologized and tried to explain what had happened to me, but he would listen to none of it.

I was changed, though. I began to read the Bible and study the literature they'd given me, and I would give up drugs as well as sex - at least for a certain time. The next day, Christmas, my religious friends called and wished me Godspeed, but being nervous and afraid to express my feelings - an uncle was standing nearby - I told them I didn't think I'd have time to see them again before I returned to Florida. My conversion was not finished however, for I would have another night of spiritual intensity.

The guilt regarding my actions at college hit me hard a few days later, and I found myself wandering in the rain one night, my Bible in my hands. Tears filled my eyes as I thought about what I'd done, and I cried in pain at how it might well affect my sister. (My sister was key in my mind this night, as I remembered the women I'd been with.)

I walked to my church in order to pray, but much to my surprise and chagrin, found the doors completely locked. I went to the rectory and rang the bell, hoping to find a priest for confession, but no one answered the door. I was most upset. (In my naiveté, I thought the church was always open - as once it was - and its servants always available.) I began to cry in the night even more.

I walked to the boulevard and waited awhile for a bus to take me to my religious friends. No bus came and I grew increasingly anxious. I found another Catholic church nearby, and, though the doors of the church were once again locked, a priest answered the door of the rectory. (I recall losing a button from my coat on the rectory stoop.)

He invited me in to hear my confession, and I gained a small measure of composure as I entered there. I was certainly still distraught as I confessed the depth of my sin, but he was patient with me and offered direction. I was confused about the path to follow: through these Protestant evangelists I'd found salvation, yet I was a Catholic child. The answer he gave I was not expecting, and was not prepared to commit to. He said I should go to both places -

return to the Church and continue with my meetings of prayer. (This seemed burdensome to me.)

I left that night, having made my confession, and on the way home I met my childhood friends gathered on one friend's porch - a place we'd often hang out. I was still most intent on what I had experienced, and when they asked what was in my pocket (the Bible), I began to preach the word of God to them. (Forever after this I would be branded with the name of "Preacher.")

I was indeed changed now. And though the change was not complete, and not too long after I would fall once more in ignorance into sin, yet the turning point was reached, and my heart was now open to the Spirit of the Lord - and there was hope Wisdom would return in strength again.

8

Upon returning to New College, I informed my most recent girlfriend of my conversion, and that I could no longer have sex with her. I struggled to rid myself of the habit of drugs, too, even throwing a bag of marijuana out my window at one point. I did manage to conquer this addiction (at least for a year or two), and I would never buy drugs again, but I could not kill my desire for women. And though I would not have sex again for six months, which at the time seemed a lengthy period, I would continually give in to fantasies - my mind was too weak to overcome them.

For my second term at college, I managed to get permission to move off campus - to a secluded house on a street called Middle Road. I had move twice during my first term and would move twice again my second term; in fact, I had five different residences during my first year at college. This was a definite sign of my emotional instability, an instability that showed also in my course work. I had barely managed to complete my first term and would somehow manage to complete my second (painting during Easter break to do so), but I'd done virtually nothing for my ISP (Independent Study Project) and would leave my third term incomplete.

During this the second half of the year, I would bounce from one idea to another, continually changing the classes on my contract (the academic form used by the college - students would sign up for courses they chose and get a faculty member to approve them), driving my sponsor up a wall. Most of my attention at this time was focused on the field of art - particularly painting and drawing. (I remember telling my father, when I'd returned home for Christmas, that the suffering didn't matter to me - I simply wanted to be like van Gogh... and I was most serious.) One of the innovations I worked on during this time was incorporating poetry within paintings. Another was dripping paint from the roof of the art barracks onto watered paper spread in various places below.

It was at this time that a fellow student artist was in a fatal car crash. This was quite a blow, but a bigger blow had come before.

One day I was pleased to discover that my father and uncle were on campus. But my happiness would soon turn to sorrow upon learning their reason for coming. My grandmother had died. (I remember briefly, automatically, turning my back to my father and uncle in sadness.) She had been ill, but it was still quite a shock. I had last seen her when my first girlfriend and I visited my grandparents' house during my first term. She sat by the door, unable to keep track of the conversation, and repeatedly asked where my parents and brother and sister were. The funeral was attended by several of my cousins and my aunts and uncles. (I recall discussing cremation with one of my cousins - I could never do that.)

My grandfather was alone now. I would visit him periodically over the next couple of years, always receiving a call to wholesomeness upon leaving his house and walking to the bus stop at sunset. He would always tell me details of his life story, hoping I would write a book about him someday. For his favorite story, his eyes would open wide and he would speak of when he was fourteen years old and the couple who took care of him (his father had died at sea before his mother and father could marry, and his mother died at childbirth because she'd had to tie her stomach down, pregnant out of wedlock as she was by a Protestant man - and with an uncle as a cardinal in the Catholic Church) came and

asked him, "What's it gonna be, boy?" (What was he going to do with his life?)

He knew even then; I was still struggling to find out.

9

I had several religious experiences in this period of my life, particularly during the break between terms when I remained on a rather desolate campus to finish my work.

I recall one day wandering into the woods behind the art barracks and lying down by a dried-up stream, prepared to die if it should be. As I awoke and went forth from that place, Bible in hand, the wind blew fiercely around me - calling me forth, I thought, to prophecy or priesthood. (I was, of course, crying.) I recall also, one day in the cafeteria, discussing the meaning of the beginning of Genesis with a student who was noted as a veritable intellectual genius. But he could not tell me what were "the waters above" and "the waters below" - and so, where was this Heaven, the firmament set between "the waters and the waters"? (My later realization of these being the clouds and the sea served, along with other revelations from the Holy Spirit, as a springboard for my written prophecy.)

It was, however, in the third term of that same year that I would meet the girl with whom I would soon move in and live with for nearly two years. How I justified this move, which I made against my mother's will (she was also against my attending this college), and reconciled it with my newfound spirituality comes from the source of my tragic flaw. It had been six months I had been celibate, which I determined quite a sacrifice. But, more particularly, I saw her as a kind of wife - one woman to whom to devote my love - and so it seemed a means of directing my passion in a more proper way. (This would not be the last time I would make this mistake; in fact, this erroneous rationalization has ever been pervasive in my thoughts and judgment.) It never seriously crossed my mind that I was 'living in sin.' This phrase and the idea seemed to my liberal mind a trite and ignorant notion... O how we reason away truth with our human minds! How we blind our eyes

with our human logic. When the passion of pleasure takes our souls, we see what we most like to see.

I do, however, recall finding an inkling of wholesomeness upon reflection about one short relationship of these sinful college years. The girl in question was quite a 'free spirit' and certainly was not considering the depth or the ramifications of our sexual relationship - but it came to me anyway that I was somehow hurting her. I recall telling her that I could not marry her. She sort of laughed and said she knew that - but when I explained to her, without finding the words, that it was not really right, or good, or healthy... she understood, and was touched. (There is a human heart we cannot escape beating in all of us.)

My new girlfriend was a poet, and it was with the writers and poets I would next associate. One weekend I would accompany them to a conference in Gainesville, at the University of Florida, where a couple of 'Beat' poets were in attendance. This experience would change my scholastic orientation. (At the conference I did drugs again - proving I was 'in' - and, while posing as a deaf mute, made an illicit overture (on paper) to a female student.) It probably caused me to lose my third term, since the time it took distracted me from the art class for which I'd contracted. (Later, the art teacher would renege on her promise to give me an extension to finish my work.) But it was also the beginning of my becoming focused and organized in my studies.

My girlfriend would help me to complete my writing for my other two classes, and my new sponsor would be the poetry teacher, and he would serve to get me founded in academia. The following fall he saw that I took a set of more standard classes, and then in November provided me with a prestructured ISP. When I came within a hair's breadth of being expelled from the college - after my previous sponsor had finished detailing the scholastic and emotional instability of my previous terms - he rescued my career from death's clutches by informing the council (rightfully so) that I had begun to get my 'ducks in a row.' I won probation, finished the term in workmanlike fashion, read two hundred pages a day for my ISP, and never looked back again - having mastered what was necessary to succeed, that is, doing my work day to day. (Before this academic downfall in college, I had failed only one class for a

marking period - fourth grade history - and that was because my childhood friend and I had gotten the bright idea to see what it would be like not to study and do really poorly on an important test... I believe I got a 'C' for the year.)

I suppose my relationship with my girlfriend was not too bad to begin with - I certainly thought myself to be madly in love. In fact, I would find it very difficult to leave for home that first summer, and then would return in two weeks to be with her. While working at the school, I would hitchhike on the spur of the moment to be with her in the town where she was staying, about an hour's ride away. We seemed very much in love. She even accompanied me home to New Jersey the following Christmas and stayed in my parents' house. But we would soon begin to stifle one another with a love that was too protective and suffocating; in this love was dishonesty... And, of course, we weren't married, so whatever illusion we may have well-created, would soon fall to the wayside, and die.

10

1980, I thought, would be a year of decision for me, and, with regard to my school career, I suppose I was right. It was during this time that my college 'major' would take shape. Though I still studied and wrote poetry, my concentration began to turn more toward the field of drama.

In the second half of my second year at New College, I began to focus my contracts on the study of drama - from Greek Drama to Shakespeare to the moderns. I took a particular interest in the Theater of the Absurd playwrights and their treatment of the ridiculous in modern life. Though many viewed them as existentialist or even nihilistic, I saw much redeeming value in their revelation of the truth about the absurdity of twentieth-century life, which they related with great insight as well as great humor. I was especially taken by the work of Samuel Beckett and the Christian sympathy I found in his humble characters.

My intellectual life blossomed in this time, as I became familiar with the works of classic writers and philosophers. I also immersed

myself in the works of classic foreign filmmakers - an engrossing pastime of the intelligentsia of the school. There were free films on campus and virtually free movies at the museum theatre next door, so each week we'd see the work of one or two of the elite film artists.

In addition to studying drama and dramatists of both stage and film, I would also begin to write stage pieces and act in campus plays. I took an acting class or two and had my first substantial role during this time... As once I found prestige from amongst my peers by the taking of drugs (which again I had suspended), I now found status in my ability to engage in intellectual and aesthetic discourse, and in my performances upon the stage.

The parties continued intense and frequent, and though I was not taking drugs (principally because my girlfriend was not doing so), I still was a regular presence there, spending the nights drinking and dancing. Many nights we danced till dawn then ambled home, our feet and ankles aching.

Another important social/artistic event of the college was its 'coffee houses,' wherein the musicians of the campus would play their (usually) original songs. Several fine musicians would attend, and, though drinking dominated these affairs, they nonetheless were excellent cultural events. (Finger-snapping and singing along were quite often encouraged.)

There was a certain atmosphere, a certain 'je ne sais qua' attitude that had a strong hold on the students, and I was finding myself a certain player in the college's aura, a firm participant within its culture.

11

That summer of 1980, I would head home to Jersey City with my girlfriend and a group of other friends from school. They were to stay at my house a couple of days, then visit the house of another student. Two carloads of us left for New Jersey on the day after my birthday and were to arrive on June the 20th.

From the beginning, the trip had its difficulties which would cause repeated delays. We were delayed in leaving a day, then,

once departed an hour or two, we had to return to pick up something that was left behind. Along the way, we visited the poetry teacher, who was stationed for summer army duty in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and ended up staying longer than expected. We shared dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant, then socialized and decided to stay overnight at a motel. We woke somewhat late the next day, but there was still time to make it to Jersey City before nightfall.

But we had to drop one of the girls off at the Philadelphia airport. We arrived late, and she'd missed the last plane out, so we ended up parked on a street of the 'city of brotherly love,' waiting for her brother to drive all the way down from upstate New York to pick her up and take her home. (There is such irony in life.) Till the wee hours of the morning, we stood and waited; finally, he came. (This was the same girl who had left the package behind at the start of the trip and, also, who became sick along the way. I remember she stayed in the van to rest when once we stopped to eat. I offered to bring her something, and she was pleased with my unnecessary kindness. She was also pleased with my efforts to find her a plane flight out.)

As the sun rose on the 21st, we sat in a diner on the New Jersey Turnpike - a virtual stone's throw from home. I remember being particularly giddy that early morning as I played with the sugar and made silly jokes - everything was funny to me. We arrived in Jersey City, but took the wrong exit, so we had to drive through most of the city with our U-Haul trailing behind. We finally arrived on a beautiful sunny morning and parked beside the green grass on a sloping street near my house. I was happy to be home, and proud to be with my friends.

When we got to the house, no one was home. I had called from the turnpike restaurant and gotten no answer, but did not think anything of it. But now I began to wonder. Then I found the small note upon the kitchen table which said simply, "Lynn had an accident" and nothing more.

In a rush of worry, and partial anger at the lack of information, I began to call the local hospitals. I called them all and got no satisfaction, so I called again, and this time one hospital found my

sister's name on its patients' list. The receptionist put my father on the phone.

I was very anxious, and the news my father gave me did nothing to alleviate my fears. I thought in my mind that Lynn had been in a car accident, but my father said she'd fallen off a hill. He then told me she had landed on her head. I recall crying, "Her head!?" And he told me with tears that it did not look good.

One friend rushed me to the hospital, trying to stay calm... I was cold and afraid, and never more tense. When I arrived at the hospital, my immediate family and several aunts, uncles, and cousins were in the waiting room. There were many tears and general disbelief. This had all occurred the night before, though the details were rather sketchy.

My sister would be in a coma for nearly three days. I would visit her room several times. During my first visit, the nurse came up to me, as I sat and cried, and gave me her communion ring - she let me know my sister would not return.

I was in shock all that day and when I lay down to sleep that night, on a mattress on the floor. When I woke in the morning, I felt refreshed and thought it had all been a dream, but the reality of the event would soon hit me once again.

My friends would leave, prematurely, that next day, and my family and I would spend another two days in the hospital waiting room. (In the midst of this, I must confess a terrible attitude in me, of which I am most ashamed. While sitting in the waiting room over the course of time, I recall selfish thoughts of how this would affect my newfound 'career.' I had already begun to dream of acting and seemed to take steps to achieve that goal, and so, in vanity and with the pride that would be my greatest sin, I foolishly considered my own fate in life - even as my sister lay dying... And perhaps the greater sin was the fleeting thought that, upon being told of the brain damage she'd suffered, perhaps it was better she not live.)

My last visit to my sister's room was with my brother. We remarked that she showed no signs of injury but some minor bruises. My brother said the oxygen machine seemed strange to him... and, if I am not mistaken, the heart graph began going in a

straight line (though, at the time, neither my brother nor I knew anything of what this meant).

Lynn officially died on the 23rd of June, and the tears and cries in the nearby waiting room were overwhelming, as we all tried to comfort one another. I remember massaging my father's shoulders. I remember my mother and aunts could not understand... (Later, my girlfriend, who was from a broken home where alcoholism was not uncommon, would remark that she had never witnessed such genuine emotion.) But we knew that we cried for ourselves and how we'd miss her, for in heaven's arms we had no doubt she was.

Jesus has died for our sins.

12

In the days following my sister's death, I would try to piece together what had happened that Friday night I should have been home. I sought out and questioned her friends, I spoke to the police, and I heard a myriad of rumors that flew about the neighborhood.

The rumors spoke of drugs and jumping off the cliff. They spoke of a jealous boyfriend punching and pushing her. They were the rumors that possess and inspire idle minds bent on the sensational in the virtually insane culture of these United States of America - and they were the product of any small town or neighborhood's thirst for gossip.

But her friends assured me she had not done drugs. The police (who inexplicably, though not unjustifiably, accused me of neglect) confirmed that no significant amount of alcohol was found in her bloodstream. And her friends also let me know that the boyfriend was not around at the time. (I happened to talk to him on the phone at the hospital, and I could confirm his innocence.) In fact, what they told me was that no one knew exactly what had happened because no one saw her fall from the hill.

The substance of the story was that she had broken up with her boyfriend (a boyfriend I did not know she had) and was upset. She was crying, and, unable to find solace from her friends, wandered off a stone's throw away. They were all hanging out in a secluded

area, sitting on rocks at the top of the cliff that separates Hoboken and the Heights of Jersey City, and my sister went off to sit on a separate group of stones.

My sister's friends continued playing cards as usual, but did try to call her back, warning her it was dangerous where she was. My sister refused to listen, reportedly saying, "If I fall down, I'll fly back up again." When her friends later looked to find her, she was at the bottom of a hill.

It took a good part of the night to retrieve her from the cliff. My father was awakened in the middle of the night to go to the scene. She was in a coma by the time she reached the hospital.

My first thought on my sister's death was that she had committed suicide, thinking of my own tendencies during these teen years. (She was fifteen.) But at my sister's grave, my father spoke wisely, as he is very wont to do at important moments. He looked me in the eye and asked if I remembered Lynn's trick knee. (My sister had a knee that would give out without warning - and she would fall straight to the ground. I had witnessed this once or twice; it did not happen frequently.) I did recall, with a certain awe, that this was true, but, stuck in my own milieu, I still doubted that it was not suicide. In fact, after returning to Florida I would call my sister's best friend again, to reassure myself she was telling the truth.

Indeed, I would return to Florida not long after and resume my college life again. And though I would occasionally find myself in tears in some secluded place, for the most part, I would keep myself from the reality of my sister's death. I was out of the sight of my family and hometown, and so my mind was not confronted with a sense of what had happened. It would not be until nearly three years later that the loss of my sister and my guilt in this matter would begin to hit home. And this realization would spur a great conversion in my life.

PART THREE

1

Returning to New College, things continued much the same as ever, only darker...

I would continue to pursue a school acting career, and continue to develop my writing for the stage. It was about time to decide on a senior project - an extended work required for graduation which generally consumed the better part of a solid year of work. I would consider writing a one-man show for myself - a common requirement for a degree from acting school - but would be unsure of the subject until the end of the semester (we were now on a semester system), when John Lennon would be shot and killed.

My relationship with my girlfriend would deteriorate, though final realization of its demise would be yet far off. My jealousy would increase steadily, even as she drifted away from me. I was engaged in a foolish struggle to hold on to what did not exist, and would stubbornly refuse to see this. Even after one fateful night when she would go off with another young man after a Halloween party - not unexpected by me - and I would see the futility of our relationship... yet I would return to being with her. And this was only the beginning of my blindness to the end.

Having graduated, she was now preparing to continue school in California, and was to leave for the next semester. (She was some five years older than me, a fact that, I believe, only exacerbated the differences between us.) A short time before leaving, she went off for a weekend with some friends. Knowing in my heart that she would again be unfaithful to me - for one of the friends going along was a guy I always said, to her denials, she was most attracted to (she would, in fact, marry him some years later) - and so knowing, partially in defense, I became involved with a girl I knew, a girl who was a fellow actor.

I was correct in my intuitive presumption about my girlfriend, and an end would come, for now, to our relationship. She would soon leave for California, and I would become attached to the other girl. But the emptiness of our love would not have seen its last day.

2

Upon hearing the news of John Lennon's death, I could not help but laugh. I did not laugh out of malevolency, but, I suppose, because this image which had taken so much of my time and energy, was not real to me. He was, indeed, but an image - not a man.

My interest in the Beatles and John Lennon had waned considerably in recent years, coinciding, I think, with Lennon's own self-imposed exile from the merry-go-round of the music business. I admired him for becoming, as it were, 'Frank family man,' and I always took him at his word and, therefore, would never entertain the notion of the Beatles getting back together. As a matter of fact, during my time at New College I had gotten quite out of the loop of the music world and the popular rock 'n' roll radio stars. On this island, most of what I heard was Motown and the avant-garde.

With regard to my senior project, I was looking for a person whose life was complete - in other words, who was dead - to use as a subject for my one-man show. When Lennon was killed, the choice was obvious to me. I would take this opportunity to go one final time through all my Beatle memorabilia, books, records, etc., and so purge myself of this attachment to him and the Beatles.

My soon-to-be ex-girlfriend was also a Beatle fan - something which bound us together - and I recall spending that night on campus with her and some friends - most of whom, unlike myself, were emotionally upset by the news.

Changing girlfriends, I would also change friends. During my time with my ex, I would associate with friends who were more her age. This tendency was characteristic of my impressionable attitude - I was easily influenced by those around me. For example, my first girlfriend at college was agnostic... and so my thinking went along these lines. This girlfriend was an atheist... and I would grow,

unbenounced to me, to the darkness of doubting God. (I believe this transformation even took place while sleeping beside my girlfriend... the spirit, I think, can be so influenced.) And so also her friends became my friends.

But now changing girlfriends, I would begin to walk with a different crowd. My new girlfriend and I would start an improvisational theatre troupe on campus, and this would be a centerpiece for my social and artistic life for the next year. And though she would leave the group in a few months - not too long after we'd broken up because of the stupidity of my becoming preoccupied again with my ex (who was three thousand miles away) - the group would go on. In fact, the general social and artistic environment of the college would percolate during this time as, in addition to Improv, a number of plays and other art events were produced. (I sat on the Fine Arts Council at this time and played an important role in encouraging the growth of artistic production on campus.)

Yes, the life of the campus began to intensify, and I would be in the midst of its growth. And so, what a source of pride this would be. Though I was not expressly aware of a loss of humility, and I would work against such a thing (I recall leaving campus and heading home alone immediately after one successful opening night performance), nonetheless, step by step it was occurring in me. (Cleansed of blindness I would need be, though the best intentions may have seemed to be.)

3

The summer of '81 I remember as a time in hell. Nothing extraordinarily horrible occurred during this time, yet the quality of that summer stands out as particularly awful. Perhaps this was because of the mere depth of lust that would take command of my life through the power of the Malevolent One.

My ex-girlfriend had returned to Florida in the spring - but a few months after departing for California - though she returned not to be with me but with the young man she'd had sex with that fateful Halloween night. Nonetheless, to show the level of insanity

my life assumed, she would not only stay in the house I was renting - for my roommate was her new boyfriend's cousin - she would even sleep in the same bed with me, chastely (if such a word can be used in this context), while involved with her new beau. Even in the nude she would sleep, and tell me she was involved with him... My foolishness seems to know no bounds.

She was assisting with a play my roommate and I were doing (*Waiting for Godot*), and thus the reason for her staying at the house, though her actual residence at the time was with her boyfriend - who would also help out on the set of the play. This was obviously a difficult time for me, and it would only continue to worsen that summer.

My ex-girlfriend and her beau would split up by the summer, and she would go to spend some time in New York. I would spend the summer back North as well, and visit her frequently there. (I worked in downtown Manhattan in the business district - a job that would greatly compound the horror of these days.) I would pursue her in lust like the young man carbuncular in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," and she would turn from me (or give in to me) dispassionately, her mind in quite another place. In fact, I would adapt the aforementioned poem to the stage, to be included as part of my senior project, and she would fly in from California, to which place she would return at the end of the summer, to star in the play opposite me. The play was dark and foreboding, and in so many ways reflected the futility of our relationship and the hollowness of our love. And still yet the relationship would not be over.

4

My last year of college began with the reformation of the improv troupe founded the year before. It would see the incorporation of the talents of particularly two other artists and myself. (We had worked together before, but this would be the height of our artistic union.) One of the other artists, the female, was principally a dancer, and the other, the male, was principally a

musician. And I, of course, was principally a poet. Yet we all were artists and actors. (There was also another integral member of the group who was himself principally a comic actor.)

Our union was strong and produced good work. The chemistry between us was quite remarkable to me. I worked better with them than anyone before or after, and would seek - at times in great futility - to work with them again in the future, but would find little opportunity to do so.

We performed biweekly for the entire first semester; our last show would serve as a fateful end to the group. The others believed we were not ready to perform, and attempted to put off the show. I was stubborn about keeping to the schedule, and so would later draw their wrath for our poor performance. But, beyond that, I had also introduced the idea of taking the improvisational form to the extreme by stepping on stage, at least for a time, with no preconception of what to do. This would be a step into darkness from which we would not recover.

During the January ISP, I would visit my ex-(and again?) girlfriend in San Francisco, with an eye toward moving there after graduation. Upon returning for my final semester at school, I would put all else aside to concentrate on the production of my senior project. "The Waste Land" was produced first (with, as I have said, my girlfriend flying in to take part in the show), then I would begin production of my one-man show on John Lennon. The Lennon script was written in the third-rate James-Joycean stream-of-consciousness style of Lennon's own books, and consisted of John recounting his life to his son, Sean, as a bedtime story.

The play was sweet and (as I have said) would serve to purge my soul of any lingering attachment to the trivial memorabilia mindset found in my pursuance of this rock 'n' roll star.

And so, soon my career at New College would come to a close. I would pass my baccalaureate exam and graduate that May. But the hold the aura of the school had over me would call me back for substantial stays several times in the years to come.

The blood of Christ is a gift that comes to redeem our lives from the depths of sin into which we've fallen.

And what are we meant to see as we look upon Christ crucified? What should we see but our sinfulness. What is to be revealed but the violence we have wrought. As the snake of their sins was lifted on a stick by Moses in the desert for all to see and so repent of their waywardness and be healed... so Christ is raised upon the cross that we might see how we have destroyed God, how we have, in fact, murdered ourselves by murdering the only life in us. For once we walked with God. We talked with God and were as His holy children - we were one with Him and in love with all His creation. So blessed were we. But how our sinfulness has led us away from that paradise. And do we see what we have lost? We are indeed blind to what we have become. And so Christ comes to show us how sinful we are, to reveal unto our human eyes in His blood shed upon the cross what we have done to our very lives.

Blood of Christ, wash over us. Cleanse us and make us new, as even once we were.

The blood of Christ would indeed wash over me, in San Francisco, California - a modern land of Sodom and Gomorrah. Into St. Mary's Church on Cathedral Hill I would step one early morning, and be so cleansed and made new, as the words of the Mass I had learned by rote as a child suddenly became this real to me.

I had returned to California to be once again with my girlfriend who never was my girlfriend, never was my wife... and finally I would come to this realization. It required another episode of infidelity to convince me, but now the end was clear.

And now I was alone in this strange place where homosexuals proudly display their sin and rule the air and environment. And I found myself, in pursuance of an acting 'career,' involved with a student film on the want of said subject. But the illusion of cinema would soon break down, and I would see the dark reality at the heart of this sickness. (What can we do for these poor lost souls but pray their eyes may, too, gaze upon the cross of Christ.)

But alone in this place I would find conversion. Having reached rock bottom, I would finally return to upward longing.

6

I was watching the World Series on TV while my girlfriend was away and enjoying the company of another man. It was the first time in several years I took an interest in the sport that was so much a part of my youth. My favorite team, the St. Louis Cardinals, was in the Series. I had inherited a love for the Cardinals from my Polish grandfather when I was but seven or eight years old. Now I was rediscovering the beauty and innocence that went with baseball.

And when I would return home for Christmas that year, my father would ask me of my plans. Despite the fact I was quite alone in California, I had not seriously considered returning to New Jersey. But something my father said stuck in my head, and I would decide to come back. He told me there hadn't been much light in the house of late, and for me this was a call home.

My father also confided in me, at the grave of my sister, something he would later deny - or rather not recall saying (as sometimes is his wise way) - something he probably would prefer I not say... but I will relate it anyway. He told me that my sister had appeared to him the night she died, before he had been jostled out of bed to go to the scene, and had told him not to worry, that she was all right. (After this, he would cry, and I would remind him to listen to her words.)

Yes, I would soon return home and frequently find him in tears upon the living room couch - and I would soon be bathed in tears myself... But before I would find my way back, I had to return to San Francisco for two months - two of the worst months of my life.

During this time I often prayed just to be able to make it out of there alive. I finished with the film I mentioned before, and so would begin to lose the illusion of the media. Along this line, the Pink Floyd movie *The Wall* would rock me to the soul and rivet me to my chair - serving to purge me of any remaining vain imagery with regard to John Lennon and rock 'n' roll. And I also finished

acting in the play *Look Homeward, Angel*, performing the role of Luke. (Again, life can be so ironic.) But in this time and all its events of conversion (I recall being at the Pacific Ocean alone till the wee hours of the morning once), one night stands out as particularly crucial.

I found myself especially predisposed with thoughts of my sister this night, and was completely immersed in prayer. I was very much troubled (again) by thoughts of the cause of her death and crying and seeking repentance of my sins and an answer to my question. I cried so hard that at one point I felt the presence of angels of God behind me, whom I asked in tears to leave - for I could not bear the blessing of seeing them.

I prayed in total concentration a good part of the night, then found myself outside and wandering toward the supermarket a block away. Why I went there I do not know, nor do I remember what I bought. But I do recall standing in line at the register, still in deep prayer and reflection about my sister.

There were two girls behind the register, one beside and talking to the other. As I stood there, thinking of nothing but my sister's death, suddenly an answer came. In the middle of her conversation, with no explanation, the girl fell straight to the ground. She stood up in fear and wonder, saying this had never happened to her before - and I knew my father had been right.

Praise God for his answering of prayers, but praise him most for protecting us from harm - for soon enough I would be out of that place and returning to my humble town.

7

The TV series *M*A*S*H* was on its last episode when I arrived back at my parents' house - the war was over; it was time to go home.

I moved into my sister's room and would sleep in her bed (which was, in fact, my own childhood bed). From there I would seek the cleansing of the love I'd wasted in vain.

I would cry nearly every night for what may have been two years, as all the sin I'd known and all the innocence I'd lost became so terribly clear.

I had begun to write again in San Francisco, and to write with clarity and purpose. It was writing in search of paradise, where is no time and no thing to distract us, as in this materialistic world. It was writing in which I would seek what I had lost and how I'd lost it. It was writing of a child of light. And though it was but notes and phrases and brief ideas, it would develop into a whole.

This writing I'd begun upon my conversion was initially oriented toward the script of a film - a silent (wordless) film which was to depict human life abstractly, i.e. the scenes of life common to all, from birth to death. It was entitled *Asylum Paradox*: the asylum was this life we're in and the art we make; the paradox was that in portraying it, we find the life beyond. With little else to do in California, I'd taken to seeing (inexpensive) movies - again of the avant-garde variety - quite regularly, and become intrigued by the medium.

There was a woman who was part of my conversion and bears mentioning. It was she with whom I'd performed in Improv, the actress with whom I'd found such chemistry. I looked upon her as a 'woman,' not sexually, but as a counterpart. And the purity and perfection of these thoughts would be an integral part of my work in these years. She was, in fact, somewhere in my mind on a night of conversion I failed to mention previously.

There were actually two incidents in California that I should not forget. One occurred while reading Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (I'd also taken to reading *Finnegan's Wake*, and being carried away by its stream of poetic sound), when, during one passage, I realized clearly that my sins were part of Christ's crown of thorns. And in the other I found a glimpse of hell.

In this more poignant and frightening experience, I found myself lying on a couch, my hand on my forehead. I suffered the sense that I could not control my hand, that my soul was too weak to control my body - that the physical would strangle me. This led to a desire for death, which led to my look into hell. For I sensed what it is never to be able to die, never to find the peace of death, and thus to suffer, as it were, eternal death - for the darkness was

never-ending. (I cried out, and Jesus came... and I found peace again.)

When I returned home, I'd intended to work, but a brief experience of this led to an abandonment of any pursuit of financial gain. In fact, my inability to work, per se, had also begun in San Francisco, for I'd be up all night writing and be utterly unable to function properly the next day. The call to write, the call to create, the call to devote myself to being an artist for Christ was overwhelming me - and I would spend the better part of the next seven years, and particularly the next two, living a monk-like life in my parents' house, purging myself through the creative process. I would immerse myself in all the arts and begin to thoroughly study the Bible.

8

I never really understood the Word of God until I read the Bible from cover to cover. In school we'd hear catch phrases, and in church we'd be related various parables and excerpts... but I'd always be grasping to discover the meaning of what I'd hear. Reading the Bible in totality made the Word of God whole for me. I realized it was one whole work, one whole word. I needed to come to the Book with the faith of a child and utter trust in the Holy Spirit - I needed to be open to the Word - but doing so enabled me to understand the nature of prophecy and the purposes of God. When I would be confused or perplexed by a question that would come as a temptation from the dark one, I needed but to face the darkness, to go through the fear, and the Lord would give me the Light of wisdom and understanding.

In future rereadings, certain passages would become clearer, but, substantially, I understood the Word and the Spirit in the first reading. (Later, I would handwrite the four gospels in their entirety as an exercise to gain a sense of what it was to pen these words of divine inspiration.) I was truly awestruck by the beauty and the wholeness of the verse. I particularly noticed the unity between the Old and New Testaments, which had been such separate works in my mind. I saw now how the former bled directly into the latter.

I practiced a number of disciplines in this time, including the selling of my possessions and the paring down of my wardrobe. I sold my records - which I'd had to transport from coast to coast and up and down the Eastern seaboard a couple of times - as well as my books (except for my Bible and the dictionary), my baseball cards, and any other miscellaneous items that were weighing me down. I was quite thorough in going through all I owned - and in a year's time I was quite clean. And I must say I felt quite a freedom in loosing myself of my attachment (of which I had been unaware) to these things. I was inspired by Jesus' words to the young man - "Sell what you have and give to the poor...and come, follow me" - and I was not disappointed by what I found. I even got down to an essential set of clothes that I would wash regularly, often by hand.

I practiced the arts daily and my schedule would change with the seasons. For a time I'd be up all night, then all day, and then any hours in between. Every day I'd dance to an album I'd buy and listen to for a time, then give away. This included a couple of albums by Yoko Ono. The first, *Season of Glass*, was a poignant expression of the pain of loss, which I applied well to my own pain in regard to my sister's death. The second, *It's Alright*, was a beautiful shining of hope. (I also listened to *Milk and Honey* - a collaboration by John and Yoko and released after Lennon's death. It contains a wonderful song by John called "God Bless Our Love.") I listened to a couple of Yes albums as well, and others from various artists, including The Pretenders' *Learning To Crawl* - a title most appropriate for the rebirth I was going through. In addition to this improvisational dancing, I practiced a series of exercises I'd learned from the dancer/artist I mentioned previously. And all the time I'd write, and meditate on the meaning of life...

My walks through the park were open opportunities for meditation and contemplation. I'd listen to the birds, and look upon the living trees and their gestures and form. Often I would look straight ahead, practicing turning neither to the right nor the left, and at these times it seemed the light and what I saw came from within my eyes. Sometimes I would feel as if I were floating as I walked, particularly when practicing simply bending my knees and letting all other motions follow. And when I'd venture from

the path I'd come accustomed to travel, to walk in the grass or move closer to a tree - a marvelous sense of newness would fill me... All my senses would become one, and a synthesis of sense I knew. (Yes, the kingdom of God is at hand.)

I recall that I would look upon my hands (and feet) in wonder - as creations of a living God. I would marvel at how the body was constructed and consider the purpose for its form. I would also concentrate on controlling my breath - stopping breathing for a time, then regulating it in and out... and I believe this gave a measure of direction to my soul, helping it to regain purity.

And I had developed my own approach to learning to play guitar, which basically consisted of listening to all the sounds it could make. First I began with but three strings - for several months to a year - then I added the others on, and put all the sounds (chords) together. (This would later develop into a style of playing I would call 'glide guitar'.)

By this time I had thoroughly given up any further dabbling with drugs or alcohol - as I say, this conversion was quite severe and sincere. And I also - at least for a solid twenty months - would be purged of any sexual activity, i.e. no intercourse, no fantasies, and no masturbation. All attention I put on cleansing myself of this sin, but it occurred truly by the grace of God, who took even the desire from me. (I recall this grace was given to me upon contemplation of the story of Jesus forgiving the adulteress, and was brought on by an absolute openness about my sin and a complete acceptance of the Father's forgiveness.)

Yes, I was living as a monk, and as a convict, and as a graduate student of the arts. But most of all, I was living as a disciple of Christ.

9

The confession I made upon returning home was a dramatic experience. I had not been to church for the better part of five years (despite my previous conversion), but now I was returning to the fold of the holy Catholic Church.

I was in tears as I confessed my sins before Mass one Saturday evening, and tears were still in my eyes as I said my penance while kneeling next to an elderly woman in the pews of the church. I recall being touched by the old woman's faith, how genuine and deep it was, and it made me more sorry for my sins and more convicted of the truth of Christ Jesus.

Additional tears came to my eyes as I listened to the gospel for that day - poetically, it was the parable of the Prodigal Son. No other reading could have been more appropriate. For now I was returning to my Father's arms and there was finding His blessed mercy and forgiveness. After the feast, it would take some time for me to get up on my feet, as I learned that forgiveness is a process... but I would not turn aside again (at least not for some time - for there was another fall to come) - my spiritual path was set before me.

And I was indeed returning to Mother Church as well. I would have a short period in which I would not go to church (though I would stay on my spiritual path) because of something the pastor said one Sunday - but I soon would indeed mature completely and cease to judge those in office... I would learn to forgive those who were held up before me for so long, and see that they are human, too.

I thank the Lord that He has taught me how to listen to and respect those who speak the words of Moses and of Christ, how to understand the importance of order and organization in the hierarchy here on Earth, how to gain rich blessings from the form that has been founded in the sacrifice of the Mass and the charisms of the sacraments - and how these need never infringe upon my personal relationship with Christ.

10

Toward the end of 1983, I took a film class at the New School in NYC. My writings were still oriented toward a full-length film, and I wished to make some practical example of my work which I could show.

I had written a short, quintessential filmscript that showcased the guitar playing I was inventing and the type of dance I was preparing. The dance was for a male and a female dancer, and consisted principally of spinning in place and in circles around one another. The script also utilized a couple of artworks I'd done in contemplation of my sister and her spirit. One, "Children of Vision," was a triptych of two angelic figures which gradually disappeared in the steps of the triptych... to eyes alone in the final frame. The other, "Portrait of the Artist," was a flat, stone sculpture of a head in profile with one yellow eye.

I had been in communication with my female artist friend from college about her coming up from Florida to dance with me for the film. (Earlier this year, I had made the first of my treks to my alma mater at the time of her graduation - sleeping in the poetry magazine office for the three weeks and showering at the pool.) She had expressed interest and agreed to help me out, but then was kept in Sarasota by circumstances beyond her control.

I was somewhat disappointed at finishing the class with no demonstration of my work, but I was on the verge of a kind of revelation.

Over the past year and a half, I had been assiduously taking notes on contemplation of my life, Biblical truths, and observations - these ruminations, as I've said, being formed toward the creation of a filmscript - and of late I had taken a serious interest in the Talking Heads album, *Speaking in Tongues*, which, in my application of its verse to the working of the Holy Spirit, opened up doors in my mind (and provided some good material for dancing). I had amassed several solid notebooks of material which was becoming increasingly neat and well-formed. But now my orientation would change suddenly and without explanation. All the tilling of the ground and preparing of the earth I'd done would bring forth fruit of a new kind.

In the month of February 1984, song lyrics would pour forth from me. The inspiration was overwhelming and nearly uncontrollable - I had to consciously stop myself from writing too much. As it was, I was writing some three songs a day, my mind constantly set on new ideas that would come to me. I would get an idea and it would gradually form itself in my mind as I

contemplated the word that was with me. By the time I put pen to paper, the song was written in my head.

Some five albums of material, some seventy songs, were written this month alone; in the next few months, the Lord would add five more. These ten albums would be the ten talents that would serve as the foundation of my artistic calling as well as my spiritual state. They would occupy the better part of the next five or six years of my life, and still continue to serve as a seminal work for me. These albums I would call *Songs for Children of Light*, as a variation on children of vision - 'light' rather than 'vision' because light is the source of vision - but also by direct inspiration from the fifth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

8: "Once you were of darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light."

-and-

18,19: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart."

III

MATURITY

PART ONE

1

I awoke on the morning of June 9, 1984, with my eyes red and swollen. The night before I'd cried more than I had this entire period of time. I cried out the lyrics for the final song to be included in *Songs for Children of Light*, "Where's My Brother?"

I had been listening to a marathon of Bruce Springsteen music on the radio and thinking hard about my sister's death and my own guilt therein. I was particularly taken by the selections from Springsteen's *Nebraska* album - a very personal, soul-searching album he had done while quite alone. The songs struck home.

I literally cried for hours, and hard. The lyrics for the above song came in pieces, in fits of tears. They were the exposition of my sin and the longing for innocence that characterized these years. The title of the above song came from something my mother had told me. She said that the night my sister died she had been repeatedly looking out the window, waiting for me to come home (as expected), and saying, "Where's my brother?" Where indeed was I, Lord?

I was not there for my sister that night, nor for that time of her life. I had no sense of the responsibility of being an older brother. I cared only about myself.

That morning as I woke, I went out to jog, as had become my custom. As I entered the park across from my house and approached the track on which I ran, already jogging lightly, a boy came (it seemed) from nowhere, stepped in front of me, looked directly into my swollen eyes, and said, "Good morning." As I continued on, I replied in kind, then, a moment later, turned to look again at this young child who had so surprised me with his purposefulness. But when I turned, I saw no one. I veered to the side a little to check behind a small bush that was nearby... but saw no sign of anyone. I believe he could only have been an angel.

Jogging around the track, I passed a baseball field where young boys were practicing. Suddenly, a black cat ambled into my path. I avoided her and kept running. As I came back around, a woman had the kitten in her arms and was looking for someone to take her. She already had several pets, but her children would not leave the cat behind. I continued on, but as I circled the track again, I began to consider the situation. I remembered my thought (of which I was so ashamed) as my sister lay in a coma in the hospital - that perhaps, if she would suffer brain damage, it might be better that she die. This was a terribly selfish thought, and now, for some reason, I felt as if the Lord might be giving me a kind of second opportunity.

As I passed the woman and children leaving the park, I approached them about the kitten. Both the kitten's eyes were closed, and she was thin and barely alive. Someone had abandoned her, and she had been subjected to the series of violent storms that had hit us recently. The woman told me of a pet store that might take the cat if I couldn't... so I took the kitten in my arms, and she clung to my chest all the way home.

She was little more than a spec upon my bedroom carpet, but the cat had enough strength to pull herself up, and actually had enough sense to go to the bathroom on a little rug my father had placed in the room. (At first my father was dead against a pet, but seeing her condition, he could not resist.) I had to bottle-feed the cat with milk and get special food and ointment for her eyes, but I was doing well at nursing her to health. I had gotten one eye fully open and the other partially open, but when I found the cakes of mites in her ears, I knew I'd have to take her to a veterinarian.

The vet kept the cat at her office and decided to operate on her eyes. She called me at one point and caused me great distress upon telling me the cat might not live. I argued that she was getting well with me and I did not understand the problem. (I believe she saw the cat as just another stray that didn't merit serious attention.) The vet hung up, and I prayed in tears that the Lord not take the kitten yet. As it turned out, the vet removed one eye, saying it had ruptured, and delivered the cat back to me. The cat has not been sick a day since.

I have the cat still, and she is still a good companion for a man alone. I named her 'Morning.' 'Morning' because it was morning when I found her. 'Morning' because the boy had said "Good morning." 'Morning' because she is black as most a.m. hours. 'Morning' because her paws and whiskers and underside are white - like the dawn. (She has a white diamond on her neck, a white arrowhead at her loins, and a white cross upon her chest.) 'Morning' because of the purity of her fur and the purity of her soul. 'Morning' because of the play on 'Mourning' and the suffering she's undergone. In the same vein, 'Morning' because it may also be 'Mourning,' depending upon which eye you see. But most of all, 'Morning' because she marked a new time for me. ('Morning' also because of the oriental nature I see in cats.)

As I conclude this lengthy chapter, I would like to relate my favorite story about my sister. On one of my trips home from college, we got to talking about a boy who lived across the street, the brother of a friend of hers. I did not even know the boy existed, so she was telling me about him and how they would play together. He was what is called a "vegetable" - unable to see, hear, talk, or walk. I, being in a state of sin with no light in my mind, was completely mystified about how she could play with such a person. With absolute innocence and the purest of joy, she smiled widely and said to me, "He can roll over!" (I cry even now to remember this.)

2

Baseball became my pastime during these years I spent as an artist monk. I returned to this game which was so much a part of my childhood, this game of simple purity.

In my first year back in my parents' house, I found an interest in the New York Mets, the local baseball team. They were an extremely poor team, but had great promise from the youth of their farm system. I recall their last game that year. (Though they had the worst record in baseball, I remained with them till the end.) In

that final game, they were losing by several runs in their final turn at bat. The game meant nothing from a sporting point of view, but I recall cheering for them with great intent and hope that day - and somehow my prayers were answered, and they came back and won the game.

It reminded me of a game I'd played in little league - the first time I'd ever been to bat. We had quite a good team, but found ourselves down by seven runs in our final turn at bat. We came roaring back and climbed within one run, but with the bases empty and two outs. I heard the manager call my name, and my heart leapt in fear and mystification - I had barely played all year on this team of giants. But I got my helmet and came to the plate - and proceeded to smash a line drive over the shortstop's head for a clean base hit. (I can still see the ball flying.) The next batter hit a triple, and I raced home with the tying run. Our best hitter was up next, and the game was soon over. We had scored eight runs with two outs in the last inning to win.

I found myself interested in other sports again as well, and learned a pure way of rooting - in the true spirit of competition. It had to do with loving and respecting the other team, and allowing things to happen. Without anxiety, without ill-will toward the other team, I could successfully encourage my team to victory. But I needed to learn how to lose and what it is to lose before I could learn to win. (And win the Mets would soon do.)

I also regularly spent time at the park, playing baseball with kids from the neighborhood - particularly the nephews and nieces of a close friend of mine. They were without a father at home, and so I filled that role to some degree, I suppose. As for me, they gave me back the joy of being a child. This was a principal theme of this time of my life. As Jesus said, "Unless you turn and become like children..."

The kingdom of heaven was all I wanted. It was all I sought and all that was on my mind. All I did was geared to the finding of heaven, and everything was colored by my striving for God. Jesus became my beloved and wed to the Holy Spirit I was.

In all the songs I'd listen to, secular though they may have been, I'd think only of my love for Christ, and apply that love to all the lyrics. In all the TV I'd watch, I'd find the love of Christ and the inspiration of His kingdom. Everything I'd do was done for Him, related to Him, and applied to this striving toward God.

The kingdom of heaven absolutely permeated my days. Every waking (and sleeping) moment was dedicated to service of Christ, and I was ever open to inspiration that would come from Him through everything and be expressed in my practice of the arts. I was indeed immersed in all the arts as I was immersed in the blood of Christ, and so at work virtually twenty-four hours a day. And though I suffered great persecution from family and friends, none of whom could understand my purpose, and was continuously accused of doing 'nothing,' in reality, I was constantly occupied. I could not let a moment go by that was not infused by the love of God. (How often I would be driven from my bed in the middle of sleep to write something down for who knows how long a period of time.) There was no escape from the dictates of the muse that pursued me. And I gave myself over completely to the hand of Christ.

Thoughts of my sister (with Jesus behind her) served as my inspiration during all this time. I felt her spirit around me, breathing a light upon me. She was as the genius loci for the house in which I created. (I later felt she became as everyone's angel, not just my own.)

It was in this time that I conceived an idea for the building of a corporation to assist in the production of *Songs for Children of Light*. I pursued this idea quite avidly. I called government offices and worked on drawing together every friend and acquaintance I had. I began to place these people into particular roles - from custodians to administrators to scientists to be used as engineers to build safe and clean equipment and cars - and spoke seriously to each about

his participation. I even organized a meeting, for which I contacted some twenty people who gave an affirmative reply. When only three or four showed up that night, I was disappointed (though hopeful still), but I knew I had to go on with my idea. I had planned to leave the next day to go to Florida - to find artistic talent on the campus of New College. (Letters had been sent out to all appropriate parties - administrators, faculty, students, alumni - about my plans upon arrival.) So, with zither in hand - I had bought this recently, along with other bargain instruments - in the box I'd made for it the night before, on January 7, 1985, I set off to conquer my alma mater.

4

I believed myself ready to embark on this search for musicians to bring to life the lyrics I had composed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. New College was an inherently artistic environment, and I knew I would find talent there. How I would form this band I had in mind I was not quite sure. But I was prepared to go by the Spirit and set aside any fears to make my search.

My principal hope was to convince my former improv partners, who were still around campus, to work with me on this project. I stayed, somewhat unreceptively, on the couch at the house of my musician/artist friend, and meanwhile approached my dancer/artist inspiration with the idea. I had been in touch with them over the year, but, though they respected my work, I had not elicited much interest from them. And the other purpose of my visit was also at hand - that of professing my love for my female dancer friend. (I had, in fact, proposed marriage to her via the mail a few months before, and felt it necessary to see her in person to clear up any surprise she felt.)

I sat long hours upon her porch one night, waiting for her to come home. She was initially amiable, then became suspicious and afraid. But after I had assured her I had not come to stay, we managed to have a decent conversation. (I recall fearing that something bad had happened to her.) The most I saw her though during this stay was in attendance at dance classes she gave at the

college - wherein I formalized a full series of exercises. She did have lunch with me one day, but did not want to hear any professions of love, and would get upset when I tended to press the issue. (I suppose I could have taken Blake's advice in "Never Seek To Tell Thy Love.")

I have always idealized marriage, and always longed to share my life in marriage. Even during my college years, marriage was a hope. I recall telling my first girlfriend and my roommate that I'd always wanted to be married - to which they responded that marriage was not for them. (Of course, they were both married before we'd finished school, and I continue alone even now.) But somehow this sacrament has eluded any attempts I've made, any efforts I have put forth (good or bad). Rejection is all I have known, in one form or another - never have I found mutual love - only tears. But this has never made me bitter.

My musician friend listened to the tapes I'd made of myself reading the lyrics, but did not pretend much interest. I passed these tapes and the handwritten copies of the albums I'd made to a number of individuals and got some positive reaction, but, in the instances when I would actually sit down with a musician, was not able to find the right sound.

I stayed on campus a month or two, sleeping on floors and the couches of commons rooms, and involved myself with the social, cultural, and academic life of the campus - even sitting in on classes. I also acted in a student play - playing Pleusicles in *The Braggart Warrior* (hoping in vain to catch the conscience of the queen's love through this role).

Eventually, a student offered a floor in a room of his house off campus, and I took that opportunity. I was then offered the job of bus boy at a nearby Italian restaurant, and I took that... and soon I had my own room further downtown, and had even managed to find the use of a moped. I would continue to take every opportunity to present and discuss my work with fellow artists, but it soon became clear that my purpose had become quite blunted: I had not found musicians and was moving ever further away from the possibility of doing so. And so I would decide to leave.

Overall, the trip was a good learning experience and artistically enriching, and, upon returning home some three months after I'd

left (on the day of the release of the charity song “We Are The World”), I would realize that I must write the music myself - but there was a definite sad side to this venture. Toward the end of my stay, I would masturbate, thus destroying the purity I’d known for some two years.

5

Upon returning to Jersey City, I typed the ten albums of lyrics for the first time and sent them off to be copyrighted. I had previously conceived the covers for these albums - an appropriate symbol for each - and now, in contemplation of what to give my cousin (whose wife-to-be was pregnant) for his wedding, and while listening to ambient music on the radio, I conceived the cover symbol for the entire work: a painting I would call “Child of Light.”

At the time, I was simply sitting and looking around myself, seeing how things around us reflect who we are and noticing the random objects which had come to be in the room I used as a study but was also my father’s shoe room. I noticed a ceiling shingle that had been taken down, because of a water stain from the rain, and abandoned there. In the stain I saw a fetal figure, and I simply painted in that stain to make the artwork. (Though made for the wedding, it became a Christening gift for my cousin’s son.)

My cousin’s wedding was in June, and it was a wonderful affair. He managed to pull together all our aunts, uncles, and cousins to travel to Pennsylvania and stay overnight in a local hotel. It was the first time in a long time the family had been all together (and probably, so closely, the last time). We swam together, ate together, played ball together on the picnic grounds, and had a wonderful, wonderful time.

The night of my return from my cousin’s wedding, I conceived the music for *Songs for Children of Light*. After speaking earlier with the sister of a close friend, I had found the courage to try to write the music myself. So I picked up the guitar that night (with all six strings attached) and began to play various chords I’d find. At one point, a chord rang true and sounded familiar - and I kept it as the key for “Dust” (the shortest and simplest of the songs). I

subsequently followed the same process for the remainder of the songs - finding chords that sounded like each to serve as keys. Finding these keys I related to the catching of spiritual fish, reeling each in as it came along. (It was quite a marvelous sense of creativity.) This process took forty days - three songs a day - which pattern would serve as a model for much of my later work.

Once I had the keys and how to play them, I then conceived the idea of simply moving the chord up and down the fretboard - fingers in the same position - to form the basic line of music for the songs. (This was the technique I called 'glide guitar.')

I completed seven songs a day in this simple style, and so was finished in seventeen days. I then ascribed the music to the typed text - with key, and number of top finger beside words in text - and then prepared for recording. I practiced awhile, then recorded an album a night for eleven days (one album is a double album) in my sister's (and my own) baby room - which was now being used by my mother as a laundry room. Then the whole package was mailed off to be copyrighted (on the birthday of my cousin's son).

During this time, I continued with constant practice of the other arts as well. The dancing, which was originally just improvisational movement to music, now had formed into a daily hour and a half regimen of exercise (still incorporating improvisational dance). I always worked on a painting or sculpture of some kind, which I often sent to my dancer friend in Florida, and which she would eventually begin to return unopened. (My largest work was a full-size sculpture of the risen Christ I had completed the year before.) And I would paint the symbols of my albums on T-shirts - five shirts with pairs of symbols, front and back.

I worked constantly and practiced constantly; my only real break was a weekly night of chess with two friends of mine. I would occasionally visit the house of my close friend and his family, who were very down-to-earth and served to keep me rooted to the ground. I would also play darts with my close friend at my house on Saturday night after Mass. (This close friend served, and serves, as a confidant, as my 'Horatio.' We share an inclination toward religion, though he not so obviously as I.) And I continued taking kids up to the park; in fact, it was in this time that I took one of my friend's nephews to the park for the first time.

The boy was only three or four, and I usually needed his five-year-old sister to interpret his speech for me. This day no other kids were around to bring to the park, so I took him up to play baseball. All we had was a thirty-four ounce bat, so I began to underhand a few balls to him. To my amazement, he started lining the ball past me, and had me running all over the lot. (The boy is now in high school and continuing to develop as an impressive player.)

So, life this year went on fairly steadily, and at the end of it, I was upon another breakthrough in my creative process.

6

As previously I had found a key chord for each of the 119 songs in the *Children of Light* project, now I found an opening position for each of the 119 dances to accompany the songs. Upon finding each position, I felt as if I were bathed in light - and so I knew I had it right. I would write down the *exact* position of my head, arms, legs, and torso. Each position was different - in various states of standing, sitting, kneeling, and lying down - and the position was to be precisely mirrored by a female counterpart. Thus the opening positions were conceived for a pair of dancers.

Once having written the 119 opening positions - again, three a day for forty days - I took another forty days to write out a basic line of movement for each song. And so the basic dance for the albums was complete.

Next, in a rather miraculous fashion, the album covers I'd conceived were transformed into the stage designs for the albums - each symbol becoming the basic object of the stage, upon which the action was to be performed. (Thus the heart of the first album, *The Innocent Heart*, became a large heart which the actors would awaken in and rock back and forth, come out of and walk around, and spin around in circles.) Upon each stage, I wrote a basic action for each song, to be acted by a pair of couples.

By June of 1986, this work was complete, and I had the basic script of *Songs for Children of Light: Ten Albums of Lyrics, Music, Dance, and Drama*. I also had an introduction which incorporated ideas for production of the script under a philosophy I had derived

from Christ's words as to the greatest commandment - loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength - which was focused on the idea that there are four corners to the universe and that these four corners extend to all things... elements, seasons, art, and occupations, as well as the human body and its systems and parts.

This philosophy would continue to occupy my thoughts and writings - as I tried to express it clearly and succinctly - and at about the same time I received another spiritual revelation from the Lord, which would be of the utmost significance.

This revelation was inspired by reading an article regarding an archeological find of a priest's vestment circa 500 B.C., on the front of which was the tetragrammaton (YHWH) and on the back of which was the Aaronic blessing. The four letters of the tetragrammaton intrigued me, and I thought to understand their significance. I read that scholars believed it either could not be pronounced or should not be pronounced... but no clear interpretation was known. So, in naiveté and with the light of the Holy Spirit, I sought to pronounce it.

What I discovered was the silent Word that is God's name. I found a Word that itself expressed silence, that expressed the inexpressible. The letters, as written, allow for the passage of air through the human instrument without human interference. And so it is the Word of words, the Tongue of tongues, the Spirit that is in all words and which spawns all life. And I imagined the priest standing in an open field, the dome of clouds above his head, and just breathing, just being - one with Nature, with God's universe. And so I myself was left in silent awe in the presence of the Father. (This is a revelation that was foreshadowed in the song "Wh.")

This revelation was particularly important, and continues to be a primary influence upon me, because it is related to the heart of writing - the Spirit from which all words come - and by it I later found great mastery in the art of written prophecy.

But now, again, the basic script of my project was complete. I had reached the climax of this creative process, and I was ready to step out and seek production in union with others again.

After a short stay on a dairy farm in Syracuse, New York - I'd gone there to get a taste of the natural life, but soon found the taste was soured by modern machinery and its pollutants - by the end of the summer, I was back at New College for part two of my search for artistic community.

Actually, the principal reason I'd flown to Sarasota again was to see the girl of my dreams, who continued to reject me, and settle in my mind her feelings for me. The trip was also an exercise in Christian commitment: I left Jersey City with only enough money for transportation to Florida and nothing else but the clothes on my back.

(It should be noted that somewhere along this line I had taken to wearing no other colors but black and white. There were several reasons for this. As an artist, I found the starkness striking. Black and white also represented ink on the page. In accordance with the seasons, black and white were the warmest and coolest colors, respectively. My cat was black and white - as were my close friend's nephews and nieces. And I had a limited wardrobe anyway, so I was able to mix and match more easily.)

So, dressed all in white - save for the symbols of my fifth and sixth albums painted (in black) on the front and back of my shirt - I was on my way. I met with great delay at the airport (it was a People's Express flight, which was rather like a bus ride), so I did not land at Sarasota until two or three in the morning. I decided to walk the four miles to my would-be girlfriend's house anyway.

I had not let her know that I was coming to Florida (I had only thought to go three days before), but when I arrived at her house, the front door was open and all the lights were on, so I knocked. She was quite surprised to see me and not at all upset. She came out and we sat on talked on her porch for a few minutes. She had a boyfriend in the house, however, so she couldn't stay long.

My love for this girl did wax heroic. I thought to overcome any obstacles to be with her - to climb every mountain, ford deep rivers... I even considered walking to Florida. But I'm afraid all my lofty ideals were in vain.

I spent the better part of the next week at the local Salvation Army. I attended Mass regularly at a nearby church and sought to speak with the priests of the area about my understanding of the tetragrammaton. I returned to my dancer friend's house another night that week, and, feeling weak and finding the door unlocked, when no one answered, I let myself in - thinking to get some much-needed rest on the couch. I decided to clean the kitchen before taking a night's sleep, but, after a while, her roommate (a mutual friend) came out of her room. She informed my dancer friend of my presence in the house. Then, after an unsuccessful attempt by her boyfriend, she came out herself and asked me to leave.

I had made a mistake, but I was desperately in love. After speaking with the roommate on the porch for awhile, I finally left - and experienced the most terrible night of my life, finding no place to rest. (I'd missed the curfew at the Army.) A couple of days later, I left the shelter in the middle of the night and headed for the airport, intent on leaving the next day. But that next morning I met a friend at the airport, and I decided to stay and again visit the college (which was just across the street).

I ended up spending another couple of months on the campus, sleeping at first in a chair at the old, broken-down sculpture barracks, then on commons room couches, then on students' floors. I ate mostly at area soup kitchens.

There was one student who was particularly generous about allowing me to use his room; he was a remarkably nice person. In fact, it strikes me that two of the nicest, most caring people I've known have been of the Jewish faith (and I have not known a great many Jewish people) - him and the older student on whose shoulder I cried after losing my first girlfriend at college.

This was a much richer cultural and religious experience than my previous stay afforded, and I accomplished much more with the students. I addressed their needs and requests, working to improve the campus life. I started an organic garden, banded musicians for nightly jam sessions in Palm Court, gained faculty approval for potential art/theatre classes I'd designed, and was putting together a theatre festival before I had to leave.

I was much like a walking work of art on campus. I wore the same spare clothes all the time - washing them daily by hand - my

T-shirt displaying my art work. I was a ubiquitous presence. I progressed so far as to be appointed by the campus council as an alumni chair, for which they promised remuneration. I was hoping only for a room on campus and tickets to eat in the cafeteria. But the appointment was soon rescinded due to lack of funding... and so my progress stopped.

Though I had done considerable work for the campus, I had gotten little done on my project. I had tried to draft other artists to participate in production with me (even an acquaintance I'd made at the Army), but again my efforts bore little fruit.

My principle design was to create an organization that was perfectly balanced and whole, and incorporated all the arts. The artists each would practice all the arts, and so find wholeness in themselves, though each would concentrate on his particular medium and style. This proposal was passed around, and some small measure of collaboration occurred, but the idea did not take hold, as in the end each had his own life to lead. (Perhaps the idea was not sufficiently cogent.)

So, it was time to get back to work. And besides, fall was in the air, the Mets were in the Series, and I heard the North calling me home.

8

The bottom of the ninth inning of the sixth game of the '86 World Series is perhaps the most memorable moment in baseball for me. I was back home in Jersey City watching the game with my brother and friends.

The Mets were two runs down and on the verge of elimination. They made two quick outs and things seemed as bleak as could be. But my brother - ever the pessimist (he is a Yankee fan and was rooting against the Mets) - said they'd win somehow. And they did.

Three straight hits brought them within a run and put the tying run on third. Mookie Wilson, a noted free-swinger, came up and soon had two strikes on himself... so it again looked bleak. But Wilson hung in there, and suddenly the impossible occurred. The

pitcher threw a wild pitch, and the tying run scored. Wilson then hit a little grounder to first, which hit the edge of the grass... and rolled through Bill Buckner's legs. Ray Knight raced to the plate, holding his head in amazement, and, miraculously, the Mets had won. I would watch game 7 at my close friend's house - and the Mets would finish off the Red Sox.

The day of the last game, I put on my sister's communion ring (which the nurse in the hospital had given me) for the first time. The only place it fit was toward the end of my pinkie. Though it has not always held the meaning and remembrance it should, it has not come off a day since then.

I attended the ticker tape parade in New York City, celebrating the Mets' victory. After the rally, I stopped at the office of my childhood friend, who had said he might be able to get me a job. I had promised my mother before my last journey to Florida that I would seek employment upon my return, and so I attempted to make good on my word. But since I showed up dressed all in white and with confetti in my hair, my friend quickly ushered me from the office building.

My efforts at finding a job - feeble though they may have been - having failed, I soon resumed work on *Songs for Children of Light*. I conceived and composed three additional acoustic guitar tracks to help fill out the music section. For one track, I used only the three top strings, and only by picking; for another, I used the four bottom (bass) strings, played open; and for the last, I drummed on the strings with my middle fingers, over the sound hole and the fifth fret. During this time, I also filled out the movement for the basic dance tracks with precision - adding camera movement as well - and completed the composition of the stage action. I then took 119 days - one song per day - to record all the additional music (using a cheap four-track machine I'd bought) and write out all the new material.

Ever the resourceful artist, for this version of the script, I used foot-square ceiling tiles I had found in the garbage of a man down the street. They were perfect because I was able to fit the writing of all four parts - lyrics, music, dance, and drama - on one surface, so all the material for a song could be seen together. The surface itself was conducive to the ink of my fountain pen, with which I wrote

using both hands. (I was fortunate to find an understanding owner of a copy store, who allowed me to place my sometimes crumbly tiles upon her machine - and at an inexpensive rate.)

Ambidexterity was another of my exercises during this time. In fact, I had developed a manner of writing which utilized all the fingers of either hand - even the oft-neglected pinkie. For my guitar playing, I also was sure to utilize all the fingers in both picking and fretting, and even expressly wrote the music so. And to improve the dexterity of my fingers, I would stare at them as I moved them downward toward the palm individually - separating their movements one from another.

I recall that during this time of cardboard writing, I took my baseball protégé, who was now six or seven years old, to a Mets game with free tickets I'd gotten from my uncle... It was now the summer of '87, and, with another stage of my project complete, I would finally keep my word to my mother.

9

It may seem a mystery to some how I was able to survive all this time without a paying job. It was by Christ's grace and my parents' benevolence. Through Christ I was able to trust in God's will and do with little, and by my parents I was given what I needed.

I have been most fortunate, in this world of decaying family life, to have been blessed by God with two wonderful parents. They are ideal parents, and their perfection comes as a result of their ordinariness - their acceptance and fulfillment of the sacrifice of parenthood.

I would like to speak very practically here, to answer any questions of how I lived in this world while pursuing such unlucrative occupations as religious writing, music, art, etc. for so long a time.

My parents provided a roof over my head. There was room in the house, and they allowed me to stay there even in these adult years. And they fed me. (Leftovers did not go to waste when I was around.) I needed little more.

For my part - for I was conscious of the situation - I did all I could to help around the house. I vacuumed all the rugs and cleaned the bathrooms each week. I washed the dishes every day. I ran whatever errands were necessary. I did whatever yard work there was, walked the dog, etc. In short, I did my best to defray the cost of my stay. And each year my parents would receive a considerable tax break because of my unemployed presence in their house. (No other government assistance was provided me.) I saw myself as a kind of caretaker, and, for what it's worth, the house was robbed twice, but never when I was living there.

I took no money from my parents other than the gifts they gave me for Christmas and my birthday (which fortunately came at opposite times of the year). I used these gifts to buy whatever art supplies I needed - tapes, paper, ink, instruments, etc. - and to pay for copying costs. I had no other expenses. I did not go out to eat or to the movies. (I'd go a year or two without even riding in a car.) I went to church each Sunday and for a walk in the park every evening, and occasionally played with the neighborhood kids in the afternoon.

At the beginning of this process, I sold my books, records, baseball cards, etc. and got some money that way - but most of this went to charity. I lived simply, and so had simple expenses.

This is not to say that my parents approved of what I was doing. As they say, they "put up" with me. I would continually hear criticisms from family and friends alike about how I was doing 'nothing.' My mother's greatest problem was explaining my situation to her friends - the stigma of not 'working' (writing was not work to them) was great in this working-class community. But occasionally she would say, as if thinking it for the first time, that it was her business what she did with her money - though this resolution never stayed. For his part, I think my father half understood, being something of an artist and a philosopher himself (I think I forgot to mention finding boxes of my father's art and philosophy books in the cellar of our house on my first trip home from college), but he was not at liberty to express this sympathy.

At times the problem of understanding this unusual life grew worse, and so the situation became more difficult to deal with - but, overall, I am quite amazed at how well I was able to get along with

my parents, living as an adult in their house. And in many ways I continue to long for these days, and for our old house.

10

Some time before, I'd taken up vegetarianism, and now in the summer of '87 I'd take a job in a health food store in Hoboken to provide myself nutrition. I worked there a total of eight months. At first, I worked only for food - attempting to remain pure of the money market while appeasing my parents by earning something necessary. I began as a cleaning person - washing dishes, mopping floors, etc. When I graduated to deli person halfway through my tenure, I began to receive checks like everyone else. (I gave a small portion of each check to my parents.) My hours also increased from about twenty to about thirty a week.

Though I'd dabbled in vegetarianism before because of those around me and my own love of animals, this time my dedication to a meatless diet was predicated on a vision I'd had toward the beginning of this monastic time. One day, while lying in my bed on a bright summer afternoon (in what was once my sister's room), I had a vision of my sister and I near the large window which looked out to the backyard. She was standing behind me and gesturing for me to look outside.

At first, it was raining very hard, and the water was rising in the yard next door (where my sister used to swim in the pool) as people there (unseen) made considerable, though playful, noise. I recall remarking that the water was rising only in their yard and not even coming through the wire fence into our yard - though occasionally waves would spill some water over the fence. Soon the rain subsided, the water disappeared, and it was a bright, sunny day. My sister was gone, too, and I was left standing alone, chewing on a chicken leg I held above my head. (A sense of my understanding of the vision may be found in the song "Children of Vision.") My initial interpretation of the chicken leg was that I was still in the world while my sister was not. However, that interpretation would later change, re my vegetarianism, to the idea that eating meat was a worldly thing that needed to be avoided. (A

note about the vision: as I awoke, my mind and the room were thoroughly filled with light. Visions are infused with light and foresee the future; dreams are but shadows of what has already been.)

I took my vegetarianism to the extreme, seeking to find life as it might have been in the Garden of Eden. In the last two months, I not only ate no meat, fish, or dairy products of any kind - I ate no cooked or processed food at all, only raw fruits and vegetables, and nuts. I lost considerable weight, getting down to about 120 pounds, but through it all remained quite strong and healthy. When I left the job, I lost my source of income and could not afford any special diet, so I adopted Christ's attitude toward food - to eat what is set before you. And in a heartbeat I became a meat (and everything else) eater, without the least disturbance to my digestion. My interpretation of the vision returned to its previous form. (But even as I write, a new interpretation comes to mind: I must overcome the carnal world in all its forms.)

I soon felt compelled to leave this job because I feared the loss of my soul. All through this time, I felt something calling me away and back to my art. Finally, upon listening to the Talking Heads album *Naked*, I became convicted that I must quit, that I could not go on. (The Talking Heads' albums provided continual inspiration throughout these years - I followed them so closely that I knew upon hearing the one mentioned above that it would be their last: the final song paralleled the last song of my own series of albums - "My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?")

I had a practical reason for leaving the job, in addition to this gut conviction. Though I had maintained a degree of work on my script during this time - I recall particularly the conception and composition of additional dance tracks as well music tracks - I had much work left to complete and a limited time to accomplish it. My parents had held over my head for some time that they would soon be retiring and moving to Florida, and that was now only a year or two away. I computed with logistical substantiation that the work I had remaining to do would take three times as long if I stayed at my job (and I wouldn't have enough time to finish). So I quit and set my schedule (to the day) for the next year and three months.

PART TWO

1

It was the spring of '88, and I was about to enter upon the final leg of my *Songs for Children of Light* project. It was two years or so until my parents would leave for Florida, and I would need the better part of that time to finish my work.

Perhaps the greatest task lay in the music. I would take the four musical tracks I had already written for the acoustic guitar and apply them to three other instruments - bass guitar, electric guitar (later, the piano), and drum (standing tom). I would thus have sixteen musical tracks per song. In addition, I conceived vocal tracks to accompany each music track - devising four basic ways of singing - as well as four separate 'real' sound tracks.

Once written, the music was recorded. This meant making four separate four-track tapes, mixing each, then mixing them all together onto one tape. The result was something I like to call 'mud,' though I myself could hear the distinction in the sound. This would take a tremendous amount of time and effort, but I felt the call to record what I'd written. (I continue to have problems I had then - finding the music I composed... getting a clear recording has yet eluded me.)

I also added three dance tracks, still with but two dancers each, but each a little different. One presented one basic motion per song, repeated continuously; another presented only the head and hands dancing; and the last presented the dancers in real-life situations (a sort of cinema verite). I would practice the dance I'd written over and over, getting very specific in the definition of the movement. I then would write the choreography for all four tracks of each song on single 16" by 19" pieces of paper.

The drama was finished as well. In the same way, I clearly defined the actions for each song by walking through each album repeatedly. The process in this final stage was quite time-consuming.

As a side note, this would be the last year the Mets would hold my interest. After a disappointing loss in the playoffs, the management would decimate the team the following year in a series of absurd trades, and so destroy the soul of the team, which was founded on youth and a sense of unity (though of late they show signs of returning to their roots).

This year, I would also begin to put my female dancer friend, who had so preoccupied my thoughts, out of my mind. Finally, I would begin to accept her repeated rejections, and cease to fall back on the idea of romantic, unrequited love. But, whereas this may have been a victory for common sense, it would wreak tragic results in my spiritual state. While my mind was set on her - futile though it may have been - at least I was able to effect some measure of control over my desires. Upon casting notions of her from my mind, I opened myself to unrighteous desires.

Though I had not as much as kissed a girl for some six years, and would not for the next two and a half, now the temptations that had been held in check began to overcome me. Already I had suffered increased iniquity upon taking the job at the health food store. Though I remained strong on the outside, entering the world was quite difficult - particularly in a place which would see so many young women. Though I had been far from perfect, particularly in the last few years, while alone in my room it was much easier to maintain a measure of purity. Now I was being led upon a road of lustful desires that would lead eventually to a serious downfall.

2

During these seven or eight years I spent composing *Songs for Children of Light*, two Olympic years passed - 1984 and 1988. I always took particular interest in the Olympics (they've always been the pinnacle of sporting events), but these years I drew a special inspiration from the games and the athletes. I identified directly with the level of dedication needed to compete under such demanding circumstances.

Here are individuals who give their lives to a goal and strive to fulfill it with every fiber of their beings. Here indeed are the perfect examples St. Paul speaks of when he encourages us to “run the race” and “fight the good fight.” This is the kind of commitment necessary to accomplish anything worthwhile in this life. In a world of half-hearted efforts and selfish and vainglorious attitudes, here are living examples of how to sacrifice oneself for a cause - not for money and not for fame, but for the desire to utilize the talents God has given.

And I saw myself in these athletes. My level of commitment during this time was unsurpassed. All my attention, all my focus, was set on the work at hand. My sense of purpose was unshakable. Despite any failings, despite lacking a single voice of encouragement, I persevered to finish what the Lord had given me to do. And though this work does not equal the sacrifices of the martyrs and saints through the ages, it is, nonetheless, my attempt at offering my life. And though I continue to struggle to lay down my life for the Lord and I have made some gains, I have not yet found the cross so palpably present as at this time.

I often long for this time, as an aging man longs for his youth. I often wish to set my whole heart and all my time and talents on the Lord, as I did then. For though I may accomplish little or much, the edge has seemed to wear off. There are now many other things in my life, which were not known then - a car, a job, a wallet, and money. Yes, I continue to produce fruit, I believe, and the Lord can take *all* things unto himself, but in my heart of hearts I long to be an artist for the Lord, to give all I am to the Lord again - clearly and completely... as do the Olympic athletes.

3

By the summer of '89, the composition of *Songs for Children of Light* was substantially complete. This final leg had been tedious and time-consuming indeed. There was little of the creative spark to characterize this period; it consisted mostly of hard work and attention to detail.

The music was, essentially, already written, so all that had to be accomplished was its recording. This was indeed the largest task of the time - recording four separate four-track tapes of 119 songs cannot be done overnight. I also had to devise and write up the graph that contained the written notation of the music.

The drama was typed up, but the four tracks of dance had to be hand written. Both had been gone through with a fine-toothed comb. And I would make another effort at writing up my idea of the four corners of the universe for the introduction. The only really original work I'd done was accomplished in one day during the previous December, when I was inspired to create a quick abstract drawing (with magic marker) for each of the 119 songs.

Somewhere in this period of time, I would make one final, concerted effort at proposing that my former improv mates work together with me. I wrote an extensive letter and a detailed proposal, outlining my ideas, to my dancer friend, my musician friend, and his now-wife. (She I had met on my return trips to New College, and I found something very familial about her. Thoughts of her served to inspire my writing of the drama, and her presence solidified my idea for a working group of two couples, necessary particularly for the performance of the stage action.) My grand ideas for a perfect artistic union would continue to go unrealized, however, as now the others joined my dancer friend in rejecting my communication. (Such is the fate of a romantic idealist.)

Yes, the substance of my work was now over, but I would spend another year occupied with my labor of love.

4

During the year following the completion of my manuscript, I would attempt in varied and sundry ways to publish and/or produce the several parts of the project. Though I would not return again to New College, I would seek production amongst other artists, particularly in the city of Hoboken.

I attempted to find exposure for all parts of the work. I mailed several copies of the lyrics to publishers I thought might be appropriate. I did the same with the dance and drama, to

companies and schools I thought might be interested. And I sent copies of tapes to independent music producers. (I would even drop off a copy of the manuscript at Laurie Anderson's management office - and to her personally after a concert. I'd become quite taken with her work and saw her as a sister in soul. But she would not hear the voice of this 'strange angel.')

The result was a series of rejection letters. I could not even get a publisher or a theatre to look at my material, though I did get some measure of response and advice from the music producers and from a local dance company.

Having gotten nowhere, I made attempts at self-publication. I put together a neatly-made sixteen-page version of the first album of lyrics and attempted to find bookstores amenable to carrying it. The only success I had was with an acquaintance who owned a bookstore in Hoboken. But, after getting no response over a few weeks, I pulled it off his racks. (I didn't really like putting a price on it to begin with.) I also made attempts to play the music at certain clubs in Hoboken, but I could not even pass the audition for performing at open-mike nights - so weak and inaudible was my playing of the unorthodox, broken 'glide guitar' chords with which I'd been blessed. (I also searched for bookstores and clubs in New York City, with an equal lack of success.)

As I'd been at New College, so I became in Hoboken - dreaming of creating a cohesive art community. I found a few other artists who shared my dream, but, once again, nothing really got off the ground. (I recall walking through the huge, abandoned ferry station by the Hoboken Path Terminal, and considering building the ten stages of my work within its confines. I had done similar imagining in the park by my house and the Armory building in my town.)

I did actually make the first cut for consideration of an art exhibit in a gallery in Tribeca in Manhattan. I had proposed the showing of the ceiling tiles upon which I'd made the previous version of my project, and included other art from the project as well the music - but this idea was eventually rejected, too. I simply could not find acceptance for any part of my work, regardless of the form I came up with. (I had also thought of making T-shirts from

the symbols of the albums, but a T-shirt shop in Hoboken rejected that idea as well.)

Meanwhile, the time was fast drawing nigh for my parents' move to Florida. The anxiety this created, due to my lack of plans for the future, caused a brief rift in my relationship with my parents, during which time I stayed out of the house all day, eating at soup kitchens (where I also attempted to ply my trade) and even seeking a bed at said establishments. This rift lasted only a couple of weeks, but the tension would continue through the end of that summer.

The days were dwindling down, and I was not convinced as to what I should do. My parents had even offered to take me to Florida with them, but I could not conceive of continuing to be a burden to them, especially in their retirement. I always felt I could get a job and support myself when I had to, but without specific purpose this seemed an empty idea. (Searching for an answer at the grave of my sister, I heard only that the work I'd done these several years had been good and worth the while.)

Then a seeming ray of hope arrived in the mail. After a year of seeking response, a small dance house in Manhattan offered to let me perform a piece at one of their exhibitions. I would have to remain up North to do so, and so I used this opportunity as justification for staying. However, the circumstances associated with my performing this piece and my staying in Jersey City would be the instrument of my severe downfall.

5

My problem with sexual temptation grew worse during this year - it grew uncontrollable. Entering into the world caused distraction to my eye, and my soul was not strong enough to overcome it.

The problem began to intensify upon my taking of the aforementioned job, and by the time the summer of '90 came, I was quite lost in iniquity. At times I would seem to have the problem under control, but soon would fall again to the fires of lust. It

seemed to me I needed sex on a regular basis, and I believed that masturbation was an awful alternative.

When I received the offer to perform a dance piece, I needed a woman to accompany me. Susceptible as I was to sexual temptation, I would confuse the partner I needed to perform the dance with a partner for sex as well.

Earlier that spring, I had coached a little league team in the park near my house. It was the first year of organized ball for my little friend, and so I took the opportunity to coach his team. (We had the best record during the season, getting all our games in during a rain-plagued year - I prayed regularly for sunshine. But we lost the championship game.) After the season had ended, one of the coaches was killed rather brutally. As a fellow coach, I attended the wake.

At the wake, I met a woman I saw regularly at church. (She knew the deceased and was actually present at the scene the night he died.) She had two daughters, who seemed to me very good, and lived alone with them. I must confess I was attracted to her, though we'd never spoken.

We talked that night outside the funeral parlor, and she mentioned she liked to dance. When I got the request for a dance piece later that week, I thought to petition this woman at church. She agreed to help me (though she was not used to artistic dancing).

We practiced at my house for several weeks and began to spend a lot of time together. One day, while practicing, we kissed. It was my first kiss in nearly eight years. I quickly fell in love with her.

The end of my stay in my parents' house was upon me, and I still did not have clear direction. I needed a place to live and I needed work to support myself, and I had neither. My partner was in a difficult situation at her apartment and was considering leaving there. In the same boat and both needing to save money (she was a welfare mother who was not working), we let the situation rule us and sought an apartment together. I quickly found three separate places of employment: I put in my application to be a substitute teacher; I called my former employer and got my job back; and I happened upon a sign seeking an artist to design coupons on the avenue near my house. All were part-time jobs, but together they

would support me. And so, with work secured and a seeming cause in the dance practice, we took an apartment and moved in together.

We had separate bedrooms and promised each other to remain chaste, thinking the presence of the children would encourage this - but, of course, it did not work. My friend had a rather bad drinking problem, I'm afraid. All was well when she was sober, but when drunk she would accost me severely. I managed to remain strong for a short while - but one night I gave in to her temptations. (I suppose I justified this sin with the thought that we would marry sometime soon.)

The sexual relationship lasted little more than a month and was actually stopped by her. But now, once in, I could not extract myself from the relationship - particularly since we were still living together. I asked her to marry me, principally, I suppose, to sanction the relationship, but, in my unwell imagination colored by lust, I also believed I loved her. She did not accept my proposal. She simply wanted to live as roommates, but it was much too late for this for me. So, for the next year I would live in a virtual hell, my lust leading me to seek her favors, which were quite gone.

During this time, my soul fell so severely to the spirit of fornication that I would find my imagination engaged even by thoughts of underage girls. I had quite lost control of the passions I'd sought to check. These eyes which once were readily averted from any untoward contact with the female form, now roved unbridled where they would. (O Lord, save my soul!)

I recall one night - utterly frustrated by the lustful situation in which I found myself - wandering the streets alone and heading for the part of town where the prostitutes were known to gather. I thought to give myself up completely to my lust. And though I did not act upon the temptations this night (nor any other time the opportunity might have presented itself), yet I was thoroughly sickened and frightened by the depth of sin into which my spirit had fallen once again.

I would have thought it impossible to find myself in such a sinful state, such a hellish situation, after having suffered so much in conversion and having dedicated myself so to God. But complacency and my own self-will did overtake me, and I slipped easily into this fallen state.

My heart was so with Jesus. What had happened? How had I been so fooled? How could I be so blind? By impatience. By wishing to move the hand of God. By excuses and false reasoning and assumption of a human sort... I wrought my own downfall.

And now I was in the midst of it. Seeking and taking pleasure, and presuming it to be a just reward for my years of service to the Lord. O foolish mortal! O lost son! To take matters into thine own hands, and with those hands to create such abomination.

Innocence had now fled; ignorance ruled my life. Blind ignorance to the sin I was in captured my days. And on I went, burning again with the fires of lust. Gone now were any holy practices. No reading. No art. No thought to write or create for the Lord was in my heart... A year I would go, or more, without using my gifts. (Blindly had I assumed this relationship would bring production to my work - after our one dance performance, nothing followed.)

And in vain I sought purpose in this situation. In vain I sought to be a husband, for a woman who wanted no man. In vain I sought to be a father, for children who accepted no one. And yet, no one had asked me to be there. No one had sought my presence - I had decided, and tried to impose my will. And the merry-go-round would circle endlessly, as ever I pursued my tail.

And though there were occasional moments of happiness, occasional times of joy, these served only to continue the horror of the situation - for in thinking of these how could I leave the premises... And, ultimately, even these disappeared.

I worked day and night, and often on weekends - and all for nought. I began to drink with those around me, again. I began to lose control of my life. My soul was soon long gone.

I went to church weekly. I received communion regularly. I had no understanding of the sin I was in. And occasional

resolutions to end my sin were always soon forgotten, as I again fooled myself into believing the path was right, and would lead somewhere. (To no advice would I listen - not even that of priests.)

All this sin is understandable in the folly of youth, but how had I, who had gone through that and come out the other end, found myself back in the tunnel again? And how would I get out? (Truth be told, I believe that in the midst of all of this, the Lord remained present to me; I believe the devil could not get entirely to me. Though I did sin, though the actions were performed, there was always something - as if it didn't happen at all. I say this not to mitigate my guilt, but to show the power and will of the Lord to overcome all illusion of darkness.)

The following school year, I would cease substituting and, at the eleventh hour, land a steady position at a Catholic grammar school as a teacher of English. (I had quit the job at the health food store well before.) That fall, I would also secure the position of creative writing instructor for an adult education program one night a week. Teaching this class, I began to breathe again - and would soon be inspired to write. But it was not until Christmastime that full change finally came.

7

At about the time of Advent, the pastor of my church called me forward to be a lector. I had given my name in some two or three years before, but it was not until this time that I was chosen. During the same period, I had heard about a new prayer group forming in the church. I was quite interested because for years I had been looking for more from the church than just Sunday Mass, but had not happened upon any other outlet for my love of Christ. But I was still living with and preoccupied by the aforementioned woman and her two kids. I still was doing what I could to please and change and convince them I was the one for them.

But, finally, during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, I stepped out on my own and went to the meeting. And, for the first time in a long time, I felt whole. Though I had not fornicated in months and had done so very little over the past year,

yet I was still preoccupied with thoughts of such much of the time. But now, after leaving the meeting, I had found strength, I had found a wholesomeness. I was finally able to turn from my temptations and live in Light again.

I had already been seriously contemplating moving out. I was afraid to leave my roommates alone, though. From these charismatic prayer meetings, I found the conviction, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to move out. (Praise God!) I realized they would land on their feet as they always did. I provided an extra month or so of my share of the rent, and I moved to a new apartment alone. And what joy I had to break free from the lust that had bound me for so long. The Lord had saved me from more toils and snares...

I was living back in the neighborhood in which I'd grown up, and was happy to be there. And I would not smoke again, and I would not drink again, and, to this day, I have kept my body free from fornication - though my mind has not remained so pure.

8

The only explanation I can find for a fall so severe after a conversion so intense is that I still lacked of something - and what I lacked was full union with Mother Church.

Though I went to Mass regularly and performed my basic obligations, in all these years I was not a living, breathing part of the Church. I longed to be so, but found no recourse... and so I went along in relative ignorance of the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, as well as of the importance of the sacraments and servants and laws of the Church - until I found the Charismatic Renewal.

This movement in the Church, so oft-maligned for its failures, its shortcomings, was the instrument which brought me into union with and understanding of the Church. In this movement, so much decried as an unorthodox Catholic entity, I found men and women of the greatest faith, and of the greatest devotion to the laws and practices of the Catholic Church. Only by them, and, ironically, by my Protestant friends - whose ever frequent and often erroneous condemnations of the Church led me to find out so much I didn't

know about the truth of the Church - did I come to be a real part of the Body of Christ in the body of the Church. This is what I had lacked, this union with the Body - as well as the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Though I had faith before, I did not have the courage to speak it freely. Though I had sung before, it was only alone. Though I had even spoken in tongues before, I did not know what these sounds were that came from my mouth after having sung my songs or spoken my verse for so long... and these gifts had not been shared and become strong. Though I loved the Lord, I thought I was the only one - but here I found fellowship that would make me strong, and ready to do His will in the world. Here I would find a sense of fulfillment. And though no one in the movement was close to perfect, perfection was our clear goal.

And I would practice laying on hands, and nurture the gift for healing within myself. Here I would utilize the blessed gift of intercession for all God's children of light. And though I knew these things before, now, in my working with others, these gifts would come to the fore. And now I would also embrace a gift of praise for the Almighty God and Father of all, and so discover the graces that come in praising His Name. (Great is our God and worthy to be praised!)

Eventually, I would develop a gift for music ministry at the prayer meeting, though at this time I still did not play the standard chords required by the volume of charismatic songs. Gradually, I would learn to play the songs we sang, and in a year or two I would become a music minister (and a prayer leader) - but for now I was just a participant in the celebration. (And a wonderful celebration it was.)

9

It was now 1992. In January I had moved into my new apartment, complete with skylights. The previous December had wrought much change: I had joined the charismatic prayer group; I had become a lector; and I had begun to write something of distinction.

The summer before I met the woman with whom I'd live for over a year, I had begun to take notes again. I would write virtually nothing more until said December. Leaving the house and its drunken disarray, I walked to the park very late one night, and sat in a peace I had not known for some time. I found myself inspired to write - a sense which had become repressed into veritable exile.

Upon returning home, despite the distractions around me, I went to my room, picked up a (charcoal) pencil and paper - and wrote, trusting the words that would come. I'd made but a page, but it was the start of what would eventually become a way of writing for me. (I wrote the beginning of "The Four Corners of the Universe," a revision of my philosophy on the balance that exists in all things.)

I had been teaching the creative writing class mentioned earlier, and it was partially responsible for the new writing above. But though my mind frame was changing therein, I still had not consistently touched paper with pen. Then, in February, I would go on retreat with my charismatic friends, and there would indeed begin to write again. Though it was but notes, it was once more becoming steady work.

The writing class would end in December, but I would continue to meet regularly with several members of the class throughout 1992. We would share work and discuss ideas, but still nothing substantial would occur. My mind was again occupied solely by *Songs for Children of Light* - as I struggled to get back on the track I'd lost.

As for my day work - as mentioned before, I was teaching full-time in a Catholic grammar school. The previous summer, I'd taught in a Catholic high school - and so I was beginning to grow in professional experience. The job in the grammar school was not bad. The teachers I worked with were nice - I had a friend from Ireland who was the only other male instructor in the school - and I got along fairly well with my seventh and eighth-graders (a couple of whom were fine writers), but something told me this was not for me. However, I would not have dared to leave such a position.

But providence would see clear to moving my future upon a different road. A cut-back in classes made my job expendable, and, though I was told another grade would be open for my services - it

turned out that grade, too, would be cut back. And so, late in the school year - after the time principals generally hold interviews for teachers for the following year - I was told I would not have a job there the following September.

10

I was not eligible for unemployment benefits, but, though I was let go at the end of the school year, I would continue to be paid by the school through August (having taken my salary over twelve months). So, I took the time during that summer of '92 to reacquaint myself with the work I'd labored over for so many years - *Songs for Children of Light* - and got myself back into the flow of creativity.

That summer, I finished the work I'd started the previous December - "The Four Corners of the Universe." Though it was not a long work, I had not sat down to complete it before. I wrote the work completely without revision. Once a word was on the page and I had gone on, I did not return to correct a thing. (Punctuation was all I was allowed to change.) This required absolute trust in the Holy Spirit and thorough comprehension at the time of writing. It was a technique suggested by a student in my creative writing class (and which I had virtually practiced in the writing of the song lyrics), but was best exemplified (for me) in the writings of Pere Grou - whose maxims I had recently read. He said he knew not what he would write when he sat down, and never revised his work. (I believe a similar method was practiced by Mozart.) This way of writing, which I believe is mastery of the art, would flower in the coming years. In fact, everything that has followed, except, in part, for this book - which I deemed less spiritually pure - has been written this way. (In this work, though following the same basic idea, I have allowed for corrections and additions, attempting as I am a complete picture of this life I lead.)

This summer, I would practice the dance and drama again - returning to a regular pattern of exercise as well - as I attempted indeed to refamiliarize myself with the work. But most of my time was spent trying to develop the music. Specifically, I worked on

bringing out the sound of each song by finding vocal melody lines that were pronounced and somewhat separate from the dictates of the instrumental music. This turning of the earth occupied much of my concentration. (I completed the vocal tapes for all the albums by the end of the summer.)

At summer's end, though I had searched rather diligently for a new teaching position - excellent letters of recommendation in hand - and though it did seem I had landed a job (being erroneously told as much at the start of the summer by one irresponsible administrator), when the new school year began, I was still unemployed. After the start of the school year, I continued my search - even applying, against my better judgment, to return to substituting... but all roads were blocked. So, I found my only practical recourse was to move to Sarasota, Florida and stay with my parents. And this I did in early October.

PART THREE

1

YHWH. The Name of God. His Spirit. The Father would reign in this time, as in my life I put Him first.

Yes, God is first. He must come first, in our day and in our lives. In our hearts and minds He must reign; in our souls He must make His abode - our bodies must be temples of His Holy Spirit.

Thank you, Father. Thank you, Jesus, for leading me to the Father and into His presence. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for granting me the peace and patience and wisdom to follow the LORD of all.

It was some months before I flew to Florida (to be with my parents once again) that I began to put God First, quite literally, in my day. I had realized the importance of praying first thing in the morning, of thinking of God and calling upon His Spirit immediately upon waking. Before any other action, while still in bed, I began to practice prayer to God each and every day.

And the centerpiece of this prayer to God was contemplation of His Holy Name - YHWH. Though I had had the revelation regarding God's Name some years before, it was not until this time that I began to put into regular practice what I had learned, what I knew. Now, every morning I would pray to God, and sit in His Holy presence (and I continue to do so).

Each morning I would also go through the coming day and ask the Lord to bless all I was to do. I would recite some standard prayers (*Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be...*) as well as words that I'd written. And eventually I would remember to intercede regularly for my brothers and sisters, family and friends, neighbors and workmates, etc. But I found the most important thing to be to sit in silence before the LORD and allow Him to minister unto me.

When I contemplate His Name, when I speak His Holy Name, this Holy Word He has given us - inevitably my mind is filled with Light, and I am renewed. And though I may be derelict in my duty to the Lord at times, if I return to worship of Him and His Holy Name, if I call upon His Spirit to guard and guide me - if I open my

heart, mind, and soul unto the Lord and yield to His Spirit, I am indeed born again and made whole. (Forget not the favors of the Lord all through your days.)

More and more I learn the importance of prayer. More and more I understand the power of prayer. More and more as I pray I find myself one with God, and I see His will is done.

Turn to prayer. Call upon Him. Bare your heart and bare your soul, and truth shall make you free.

2

I suppose I was not truly free yet, and so I needed time again in the home and hearth of my parents to heal any lingering wounds come from sin.

I was made most comfortable in the new abode of my parents, which was much more elegant than, if not as large as, our house for so many years (though I did have a bedroom of my own and even a private bathroom).

In the first couple of months of my stay, I accomplished several tasks. With regard to my *Songs for Children of Light* project, I spent forty days recording a new version of the basic guitar track of each song - incorporating the vocal melodies I'd found in the singing. This was a somewhat fruitful effort to bring the songs forward, but they still lacked a full musical sense.

I soon discovered a charismatic prayer group at an area church, and would become a regular member there. These meetings, though small in number of participants, were most intense in spirituality. At times I felt as if I were sitting at table with the apostles and the Lord. At times the speaking in tongues came very strong. I learned by my experience in this group that numbers are indeed unimportant - the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be relegated to the amount of people present. ("Where two or three are gathered in my name...")

After several weeks of useless searches of the want ads, I landed a temporary job at my alma mater through the benevolence of my former poetry professor. Upon my arrival in Sarasota, I had put in an application with the Student Affairs office of the college.

They were creating a new position which was virtually identical to the function I'd served in my previous stays at the school - a sort of campus coordinator - and I had high hopes of securing this position. It seemed as if the job were created for me. It even turned out that a former professor of mine, who'd written me a letter of recommendation, was chosen to head the committee picking the candidate. But I suppose she'd lost confidence in my abilities and the committee was seeking a more beaurocratically sound option, because I would not even make the short list.

However, my former poetry professor did come through with a job which was of some interest. There was a new fine arts facility being completed on campus - new buildings for sculpture, painting, and music, as well as a small theatre - and I was to act as his deputy at the site. (He was Head of the Humanities Division at the time and responsible for overseeing construction.) So I performed various functions, from drilling holes and carting books to being the keeper of the keys, and I enjoyed being in on the beginnings of this new art adventure at the college.

Perhaps the most significant occurrence during this time was my beginning to write original verse for the first time in quite a while. For so long, I was completely focused on *Songs for Children of Light*. All my artistic energies went toward the composition and attempted publication of this work. All writings were oriented around this work alone. Now, for the first time, I began a *new* work, a different work. I practiced fully my newfound method of unrevised writing, completely trusting in the Holy Spirit, and commenced on a work titled, appropriately enough, *Wordspeak*. Each night I would sit down and let the Spirit speak through me in poems that were usually a page long (and used periods after each expression or word phrase) - starting only with the basic inspiration and the first words. To illustrate my continued attachment to *Songs for Children of Light*, the work consisted of 119 poems - the same as the number of songs. The work came in three sections.

So, before the end of the year, I'd acclimated myself and received some newfound inspiration.

Upon the dawn of the new year (1993), things were looking rather rosy in my life. I was in the midst of penning *Wordspeak*; I was continuing to attend weekly charismatic prayer meetings; the job at the school was going well; and much was occurring on campus.

Upon my arrival in Sarasota, I determined to reacquaint myself with the college campus and what was going on - I suppose in preparation for the possible appointment to the new position of Student Life Coordinator. I began talking with students and faculty, and getting involved with various activities - much as I had done in previous stays (though perhaps in a more controlled way). Now, in January, activity would begin to percolate at the school.

For the January ISP, a campus-wide conference, involving participation from all factions of the college, had been organized to discuss the nature of the school and the path it should follow. I attended the weekly general meetings and contributed my perspective as an involved alumnus, and became quite engaged in these lively discussions on academia, racism, student life, etc.

In addition to this convocation, the campus was being visited by an avant-garde theatre troupe from Indiana. Their four-week stay coincided with the conference, and they served to inspire (or enrage) us all. I participated regularly in their workshops and discussion groups, and took part in two of the pieces they were preparing for a final performance with the students. The group was very philosophical and heavily political in their approach - a sort of guerrilla theatre espousing the value of shock tactics - but had a marvelous aesthetic sensibility. Their work was quite musical, I thought, and they did indeed incorporate instruments and movement in their pieces. They did beautiful and engaging work. So, throughout January, I found myself very active in the life of the campus, and intellectually stimulated thereby.

In addition to these profitable activities, I had also been engaged to write a profile on the New College sculpture professor - whom I was helping set up his new workman's paradise of a studio - by the editor of a local arts magazine. (I'd met her while she was covering the imminent opening of the new fine arts facility.) Things did indeed seem to be developing well for me.

Also, for the first time in my life, I now had a car. I had always resisted the idea of driving. (In my first attempt at age eighteen I failed miserably, hitting a parked car on a sunny Sunday afternoon.) I really found automobiles and their pollutants rather repulsive. During my monastic years, I had let my license expire (though I never really used it after the above accident), but in the past year I had taken a couple of lessons and gotten it back again. Now my parents were kind enough to give me their old car (which was like new) as they bought a new one for themselves. I did need it to get around in Sarasota.

However, though things did roll smoothly throughout January, the hand of fate would soon change matters. The conference ended, the actors went home, and the opening of the complex was upon us. I found out at about this time that I would not be considered for the new campus life position, so, with the opening of the arts facility, my work and my time at the college were coming to a rather sudden close. Also, after spending some time perfecting my profile, I was told by the editor of the arts magazine that it was not appropriate for such a publication - I was unable to write in a commercial style. So, as well as things had been going - to the point of nearly fulfilling some long-standing art and theatre dreams at New College - they did suddenly change, and began to look a little bleak again.

I had to now take work in the much-dreaded field of substitute teaching, and I began to wonder about my purpose in Florida, where there were not even sidewalks to walk upon and think. I missed my church and the brothers and sisters (and singing) at the charismatic prayer group... and so I began to turn my lonely sights upon Jersey City again.

4

To return to Jersey City was not a present possibility upon my departure, but finding no steady employment and no firm purpose in Sarasota, I had to consider this option. And so I mailed letters of application to a couple of high schools up North. When I heard

back from one via a telephone call, I could not but pursue this opportunity.

Toward the end of April, I drove all the way to New Jersey alone and stayed at a friend's place in Jersey City; I needed to be interviewed to be considered for a teaching position. I stayed but a week, but it did not take long to know I would be back.

The interview went well, and, in the midst of my stay, I attended a charismatic prayer meeting at my church. That night, though I had not yet heard the results of my interview, I knew I would return. The love I felt and the sense of Jesus I knew in the company of my brothers and sisters convinced me that I could not do otherwise. The day before I returned to Florida, the principal confirmed my acceptance, and even offered for me to teach summer school. And so, before I left, I arranged with my friend to return in two months and stay with him again.

By the time of this travel, I had completed *Wordspeak* and begun a new work called *Crosswords*. This shorter piece (thirty-three pages) incorporated Biblical quotes and my own snippets of verse, all on the theme of the death and resurrection of Christ. Its strength was the brevity and directness of the verse - none were more than five or ten lines, most being shorter than that. (Three passages were presented on each page of poetry.) And of course the inclusion of Holy Scripture and its Spirit gave the work its greatest gravity.

This is perhaps the most dramatic of the writings which followed *Children of Light*. It lends itself well to being read aloud. In fact, it would later be read aloud by three voices one night at our prayer meeting, and be performed in pieces at a prayer service at the high school at which I was to teach. (The students I worked with and the administration who used it seemed impressed by its profundity. It is most appropriate for Easter reflection.)

Before I would return to Jersey City, I would complete *Crosswords* and begin another new work - a short story called *On Saturday Morning A Child Stays In Bed*. It was the first prose fiction piece I'd written. It had but one main character and one principal scene, so it was not a terribly involved piece, but I think a reader might find the imaginings and sensibilities of the young boy engaging. I had hoped to add drawings to bring out the wonder of the story, and since I felt they ought to be in color and I have only

worked in black and white, I asked my Hispanic artist friend (who had been a member of my creative writing class and in whose apartment I stayed on my return(s) to Jersey City) to provide this part of the project. But as yet he has done little to this end and the idea has all but died out. (Though who knows what the future might bring.) During this time, I also organized the 119 songs of the *Children of Light* project into triads - forty trios of songs that are related and could, theoretically, be performed together.

So, my path now being set to return hence, I left for Florida to finish my stay at my parents' house. I completed my term of substitute teaching (and was nearly offered a permanent position at one of the public schools - though this distraction passed quickly), and, though my parents were sad to see me leave, I packed my things (and my cat) for my return drive to New Jersey.

5

I had enjoyed my stay with my parents, and it had been quite profitable. It was good for me to spend extended time with them and to understand what their lives now were like. I took pleasure in simple things like playing board games with my mother and my aunt/godmother, and watching Sherlock Holmes on TV with my father; I was comfortable in their company.

It was good, too, to see my brother - who'd moved down there the year before - despite the difficulties we'd endured through several years of sharing a floor in our parents' house as adult children with very different lives. (I had never been too pleased about being awakened in the wee hours by his entrance into the house in the company of rather drunken friends, but I suffered greater agitation from the fear and worry I experienced when he was *not* home at these times.)

I have hardly mentioned my brother, especially in these later years, but thoughts of no one else bring me such pangs of emotion. Perhaps there is no one else I love as much... though so often we find trouble expressing ourselves. I love my parents dearly, but I think it would be more for my brother that I would consider moving back to Florida.

But now it was time to return to New Jersey. Before I left, I saw my dancer/actress/artist friend after one of her performances at a local theatre. She was from Sarasota and had recently returned from a stay in New York. She still seemed as if she wanted little to do with me. I had hoped to put all things behind us, but there was little possibility of this. (*C'est la vie, and peace to thee.*)

Upon arriving in Jersey City, I was to teach a class of English and a class of religion in summer school. I stayed a few weeks at my Hispanic artist friend's apartment (he was a gracious host - I don't know if I could have felt as at home with anyone else), then found my own place - the same apartment I'd left some nine months before. It had not yet been rented out again. (It was strange to find things just as I'd left them; even the note I'd put on the door - when I stepped out to the store - for the cab driver who was to take me to the airport was still on the kitchen counter.) So, I was back again, and I quickly resumed my life of teaching, writing, and participating in the church and its prayer meetings.

In the fall, I was to teach three classes of religion (and two classes of reading), beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures - so I brushed up on my Old Testament. (I had already read the Bible from cover to cover for the third time while in Sarasota with my parents. The second time was during the year after I'd finished composing the *Children of Light* script and was attempting to produce it.) Though I found much in the textbook rather heretical in nature, class during this first semester would go relatively well. (I began by teaching about the tetragrammaton.) But discipline would gradually deteriorate.

I finished writing *On Saturday Morning A Child Stays In Bed* and would immediately begin yet another new work - driven from bed with the initial inspiration. This would be a very long one called *Kneeling in Silence*. It would turn out to be about two hundred pages and occupy the better part of the coming year. (It is a strongly mystical, prophetic writing.)

I would return to lecturing in my church, and in the prayer group I would now begin to serve as music minister, playing guitar with two Philippine friends - both of whom were named "Romeo." Only one of us was particularly good on guitar (it wasn't me), and

he was least familiar with the songs... but we gradually expanded our repertoire and developed a solid ministry.

We were greatly aided in these developmental stages by a songbird who flew into our church for a short stay - a young lady who was a recent graduate of a charismatic Catholic university and had wonderful talent for singing and guitar playing, as well as other blessed spiritual gifts. I, of course, would fall in love with her, though with a love purer than most known by me. But, of course, this possibility would go unfulfilled. She was inconsistent in her commitment to the prayer group and nonexistent in any commitment to me, but I did learn a good deal from participation with her in the choir she founded at church. (She'd been hired as music director of the church.)

Actually, there is a story in this. I had a special attraction to her immediately upon seeing her at a mutual friend's house. (The quote from the Bible, "This is flesh of my flesh," ran through my mind.) After praying about her all week, and seeking a sign the following Sunday morning, I would find her sitting next to me in church as she performed her duty as singer and I performed mine as lector. (I had not been aware of her appointment before this.) To take this a step further: I recall witnessing the moment my pastor spoke with the father of our mutual friend at a Lord's Day Supper about bringing her here - though I heard not a word they said. (How life goes...)

Generally, this time was very fulfilling, artistically and spiritually - though I yet would feel incomplete and ill-at-ease in my professional life as a teacher. But I stuck it out and relished the occasional joys of teaching I would experience, and I used the time it afforded me to work in the church and on my art.

6

Christmas of '93 was a special time. For the first time in my life I went Christmas caroling, which was an absolutely wonderful experience. I went with the choir, including a large number of children, and the leader of our charismatic prayer group - both he

and our choir leader were quite used to this tradition. There were twenty to thirty people all together.

It was marvelous to wander through the streets with such a large group of people, singing joyfully and quite freely. This may not seem like much to most people, but keep in mind that we were walking the streets of Jersey City, which are more attuned to voices of violence than charity. (I believe we conveyed some measure of hope - I was told as much by several folks Christmas morning at Mass.)

But perhaps the highlight of the season was Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. The choir had prepared special songs and arrangements, highlighted by our director, who could sing like an angel - St. Paul of the Cross was certainly not used to her caliber of talent - and by all the special ceremonies that went with this night. I remember leaving my childhood friend's house to go to the church for rehearsal at about eleven p.m. and the absolute blessing I felt as it began to snow lightly - the first snowfall of the year. (However old I get, I am still enthused by the first snowfall of the year.) Also, the Mass was being offered for the mother of my childhood friend, who was as a second and religious mother to me - devout as she was in reverence to the Church. (She had passed away several years earlier, shortly before my friend's wedding, after suffering long with a cancer that gradually took her life.)

The final time I would play guitar with my singer friend would be at a special Pentecost celebration organized by the Hispanic priest in our parish. He'd invited several prayer groups to an all-night vigil to take turns praising the Lord and sharing their gifts with the Church. Our group was the only English-speaking one, but that did not dampen our spirits during this blessed night.

I played guitar with my friend during our segment of the night, and also between each of the segments. As I say, there was overwhelming joy that night. (I found the release of two white doves in the church particularly inspiring.) It was a fitting swan song to our musical relationship. She who was prone to change in her life would leave shortly after that weekend - Mass on Memorial Day would be the last time we would spend together... Another hope had flown away, but it was a blessing to have known her.

During the time she was here, I worked toward the completion of *Kneeling in Silence*, a work partially inspired by her saintly and suffering ways. Also, she was technically responsible for songs I would write over coming years, which are of a more standard nature. It was her suggestion, after inquiring as to whether I wrote other songs than *Songs for Children of Light* (which she did not take greatly to), to record the singing that came to me, that I might be able to develop the songs. Songs are always coming to me - I am always singing - and so I took her advice and recorded the inspiration I'd be given. And so have I composed a few compilations in this way, even incorporating tongues in some songs.

So, our songbird's brief stay in our parish was at a close - the congregation would certainly miss her voice (though some did not appreciate her introduction of charismatic songs into the liturgy) - and I was upon another change myself.

7

As I set off for the woods with my charismatic friend (our prayer group and praise leader) in May of '94 for my second retreat, it was upon my mind to deeply consider the course of events that might lay before me... I was to decide on the efficacy of remaining as a teacher at St. Anthony High School or of following another path, particularly one which (hopefully) involved the practice of my writing, of my art.

I recall we had to pass beyond Hope on our drive to the woodland retreat house, and so I had to leave whatever imagined future I might make for myself, and seek the will of God alone. The retreat teachings dealt with breaking the shell of the man to find the life that is within, and the fact that though this may be a painful procedure, it is nonetheless necessary for true growth. ("Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...")

It did seem this dramatic at the time, as indeed we are wont to shake at the least that is asked of us by the Lord. Out of proportion we do blow things that even upon doing (and certainly afterwards) with the help of the Lord - which is always with us when we do His

will - become quite simple. And simply put, I decided to be truthful with my principal in the interview that would follow this retreat. I expressed my doubts of my ability to control a class of difficult children and be mother, father, psychologist, sociologist, security guard, and sometimes teacher to these often dysfunctional kids - love them as I did. And she agreed, and never actually asked me back.

Any doubt I had about the situation was quelled in the next few days when my tire was slashed in the parking lot of the school. This was painful enough but to be expected from children who fear rejection, and it is not what cured me of doubt. (However, it did confirm that worse might befall me if I stayed, and, though I did not fear for my person, I did fear the guilt the criminal might incur through me.) The fact that the administration took little action, and did not as much as offer to defray the cost of the tire, confirmed that where I worked I was not supported.

And so I was free of this job. And so I would not have to again experience its dread. And so I would set my sights and my heart firmly on my art once more. And so I would again seek a way to serve the Lord that was more in tune with my gifts.

That summer I felt the call to dedicate myself wholeheartedly to my artwork. I recorded the first of my collections of standard religious songs, which were much in line with the songs of praise and worship I'd come to play regularly at our charismatic prayer meetings. And having finished *Kneeling in Silence*, I thought to seek a publisher. I had an idea that both works might be more accessible and, so, more produceable than others I'd made. Yet I would seek in vain again. (Someday, perhaps, I will simply accept the Lord's Hand in all of these matters.)

Leadership of the prayer meeting fell to me that summer as well. My friend had gotten a mind to move out of Jersey City with his family and found himself unable to continue with commitment to leadership. I was happy being music minister, after taking some time to master this gift, and was reluctant to accept leadership as well. But, at the urging of several members, I took this weight upon myself, and orchestrated the meetings through the summer.

That summer, an Indian priest who was studying in Rome would return for duty at our parish. (He had been here the summer before as well.) He encouraged me in serving the prayer group and would have had me become a priest. He was a most peaceful and humble man who took great joy in simple things, and I found him to be a good companion and friend - I was quite sad to see him go. But the call to priesthood has not been with me - though a call to greater chastity (and obedience) I may need to heed. (He also left me the legacy of reading the *Our Sunday Visitor* newspaper each week.)

At this time, plans for a soup kitchen, which had been discussed for some months to a year, finally began to take shape. After so many long hours of talk, we would finally begin to put into practice our hope to serve the hungry. We'd had one serving in May and another this summer, and in September we'd begin serving weekly hot meals. And I would serve as the kitchen's director. (My main contribution was the idea to organize four teams to take one weekend a month - and so I called upon four separate groups within the church, and they responded.)

I recall feeling absolutely abandoned by God when we received few guests during the initial regular servings. I had quite given up all hope one Saturday afternoon when again no one was coming, and I had begun to believe it was not meant to be - that same day we served some thirty people. (All things are in God's hands, not our own.)

In addition, I moved that summer from my skylight apartment to one around the corner which was both less expensive (an important consideration since I had no idea from where I would receive my next check) and more conducive to art work, particularly music, since there was a small, separate room I could use as a studio (wherein I felt a call from the Lord) and the landlady was virtually deaf. I had also begun to have some difficulty with my previous landlord and found the need to rediscover peace of mind and trust in the person from whom I rented.

And so, through this most busy summer I made it with money saved from my now-gone job.

It was getting close to the deadline, another moment of decision was drawing nigh, as I needed to request that the landlady accept my security deposit as payment for October's rent. I was not worried or concerned, however, as my trust in the Lord was great, and I'd also come to the understanding that I needn't despair because God had blessed me with parents who were always there. But it was getting down to the wire.

There was, of course, some talk of my returning to Florida, but this was not something I could really see myself doing - though I was open to whatever the Lord had for me. At this time, my father greatly surprised me when he said with genuine faith that something would turn up. My father has always tended more toward logic than hopeful possibility, and so, when he said this I knew something would indeed turn up. And it did.

I woke one morning with thoughts of a local college on my mind and a memory of an acquaintance who once worked there as a tutor. And I felt myself driven to investigate this idea. I called the office and got a response, and when I went in for an interview they offered me work. The pay was rather minimal (\$7.50 per hour) and the hours limited to nineteen a week, but it was something I could not turn down - though I yet expected something else to come along. I began there in October and even managed a few days of substituting (in Hoboken, though, not Jersey City), and so was beginning to eke by.

I would have to scrape by this entire school year. Additional tutoring hours at another college would not come until the following semester, and even they were minimal. But, with some assistance from my parents and other minor intercessions (I recall my former roommate handed me an envelope with \$100 in it in church at Christmas as a thank you for financial assistance given while living with her - she had now come into a little bit of money), I managed indeed to barely get by. However, my philosophy was that it was better to barely get by in the world than to barely get by with the Lord - this life afforded me time to dedicate to my writing and my volunteer work in the church.

The soup kitchen was in full swing, serving about fifty people a week, and was beginning to occupy the lion's share of my time in the church. Between shopping and meetings and making phone calls to organize people and working each Saturday at the time of serving - this had become a substantial part-time job. And so I had to make adjustments to my schedule.

Leading the charismatic prayer meeting had become quite a burden and, since we'd been blessed with a charismatic priest in our parish (who arrived at about the time our charismatic singer left), I thought it wisest to allow him to lead the meeting. Also, there were others with whom I'd been playing the music (and practicing once a week), and who were better musicians than I, so I called on them to take these reigns - and I left the Friday night prayer meeting. I felt spiritually able to do this because there was still a Sunday night charismatic intercessory prayer meeting before the Blessed Sacrament that I had been leading for a good year (to do which I had been given a key to the church) which was no burden to me, and from which I found the fellowship I needed. (This is a beautiful and humble meeting which runs orderly and with the even participation of its members.) I also felt myself called to other projects within the Church, including a youth group that would begin the following fall.

After Christmas, I found it necessary to leave the choir as well. It was a bit hectic to run from the soup kitchen to choir practice on Saturday afternoons, and I was lacking time to myself. (I do join them at Christmas time.) Another problem I'd found I was having was being in the spotlight too much. It was becoming a source of pride in the prayer meeting, and I feared I might be becoming some incitement to lust through my musical performances. And so I stepped back.

In addition, beginning in October on the feast of St. Francis, at the request of the Columbian priest in my parish - whose English was limited - I was giving short reflections after the gospel at 5:30 Mass on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I had gotten to know the priest well over the summer when I would attend daily Mass regularly, assisting him with lectoring duties on said days, and upon his return from a vacation he requested my assistance in the above-mentioned capacity as well. This was also a time-consuming

assignment, but one which granted me great insight from the Lord - although I do regret that as I went back to work I would only come to daily Mass on the days when I had this specific function to fulfill. But I did study the readings for each day at home.

This was perhaps the greatest honor anyone has ever granted me, and I devoted myself to its proper and humble fulfillment. I never took it upon myself to preach extemporaneously, but always simply read the messages I'd gleaned from the readings (trusting in the Holy Spirit), which I'd carefully written out. But I grew afraid that the congregation might be seeing too much of me, and so at the end of March (on my sister's birthday) I stopped giving these reflections. (I had also hoped this would encourage our priest to step forward and trust in his English, but this still has not happened as yet.)

Perhaps the length of this chapter will grant some sense of the depth of work I was doing for the church.

9

Tutoring has been an unforeseen, pleasant compromise in my profession as a teacher. Lacking the patience to work with children in a classroom situation, desiring more to teach than to discipline, and without the time to devote myself wholeheartedly to the profession - tutoring in college has provided an answer to my need for material accommodations and my distaste for classroom teaching.

In tutoring, I generally work with one student at a time - a student who seeks my services and so is actually interested in learning. Working with adults has done away with any need to play games or baby-sit, and the fact that I do not have to prepare lessons, correct papers, or worry about grades - I work for the time I am there on material the students bring - has left me time to pursue creative inspirations and volunteer in my church. As I say, it has led to a reasonable compromise of these three areas of my life, and though the first year was a struggle for hours, I am now getting enough work to provide for my needs.

The first semester I tutored in writing and in math, usually basic algebra (which I certainly needed to brush up on). The second semester I was moved to another campus, which is, as it were, in the heart of South America. I work with ESL students, 90% of whom are Spanish-speaking, and actually spend most of my time there simply conversing in English. The students get little opportunity to practice their English once they leave school, because Spanish is the language of practice for miles around. They speak Spanish at home, at work, in their stores... many live here for years without ever learning, or having to learn, a word of English. So I am there for them to practice with.

It is very rewarding work because of their desire to learn; I have developed a great respect for these immigrants. Many work, have families, and go to school. Many have undergone great struggles to get here and suffered hardships while here. Many are discriminated against. (This saddens me the most, being familiar with the attitudes of people I know.)

A Vietnamese woman whom I tutored, and mistakenly began to fall in love with - to my great pain - spent twelve days on a small boat (the motor broke down after two days) with some seventy people, people who had to sit on top of one another and who had minimal food (perhaps a piece of a fish that was caught) and water (maybe a half a glass a day). This after traveling to three different countries and undergoing indoctrinations and long periods of waiting... and then to be ignored by Americans when she got here.

So many struggle so hard to make it, and want so badly to learn the language that they might fit in. So many times I have had tears come to my eyes in listening to their stories. (And oh how insensitive we are!) This has been a blessed learning experience.

My tutoring at the other school is more ordinary - usually in English composition - but it can be rewarding as well. It also affords me time to write and read when students miss their scheduled hour-long appointments. (In the past couple of years, I've read the new Catechism and a few works by Pope John Paul II, whom I was graced with seeing at a recent Papal Mass - this experience made me feel whole as a Catholic.) And so, for the time being at least, I seem to have solved the balancing of my needs and my call. And I have found a sister as well.

In the past year, aside from this book, I have written seven short works and revised the form of the lyric script of *Songs for Children of Light*. Five of the short works have been copyrighted under one title, as have the other two. These works vary in length from eleven to fifty-something pages.

The first of the short works was begun toward the end of last year, but was finished this year. Its title is *Only Son* and it is some thirty-three pages long (eleven chapters, three pages each, with a two-page intro and two pages of end notes). It expounds upon and glories in the fact that Jesus *is* the only Son of God, that none other compares with Him, and that His time is nigh.

Only Son is the last work for which I would use the typewriter; after it I began to use the computers at the college. I had long dreaded the use of computers (as I had cars), finding them terribly unnatural and producers of headaches and sore eyes. But, having the opportunity to employ them, I found them useful tools, so I bore with the eye aches. I had made a couple of friends at school who helped convince me to give the computers a chance. One of them is like a computer angel, and the other is the sister I mentioned at the end of the last chapter, whose advice I took on preparing the manuscripts for the following works, and who was especially helpful in my reworking *Songs for Children of Light* on the computer - using white print on a black background.

The other works I wrote during this time (employing the method of no revision outlined in earlier chapters) are, in order of appearance - though some were worked on simultaneously - first, *Asleep in the Garden*: a work of poetry delving into the apostles (and our own) sleeping as Jesus suffered - and, so, the necessity of His dying. I made a very graphic painting (on a found piece of window) of the same title to accompany the twenty-two pages of poetry. *New Life (A Letter of Love to the Body)* is the next work. It was written as a letter, much in the style of St. Paul's epistles, to my brothers and sisters upon the face of this Earth and speaks specifically of the wonder of our one day being together with the Lord in heaven. (I hope to see you there.)

The next two works are rather similar in nature; they are poems of the same length (twenty-five pages: five sections of five pages each) and on related themes. The first, *I Am...*, was an attempt to define, specifically, who I am and what my purpose is as a mystical writer. It is also a discourse on the meaning and humility of monastic life in general. I was exploring the theme of the soul's search for God. The other, *YHWH: On the Name of God*, was a return to the theme of God's revelation to me of the significance of the tetragrammaton - the WORD which Jesus becomes. This was a subject I felt deserved further expounding, and so I devoted another work to exploring this silent Name of the LORD.

The final two works are also related and, as I've said, were copyrighted together - they were written rather simultaneously. The first, *The Gift of the Cross* (the longest of the works in this series), speaks of the glorious gift of love the cross of Christ is for each of our lives - that in His suffering is freedom and triumph over the world. What is often thought a burden is actually our source of absolute transcendence in love. (What a privilege it is to share the cross with the Son of God and be as His servant!) The other work, *Eternal Life* (the shortest of these works), explicates the redemption that is ours through faith in Christ and presents a vision of the perfection that awaits us all (even now). It was particularly inspired by meditation before the Blessed Sacrament.

Creative writing is a marvelously refreshing practice; one feels the Hand of God with him. I usually begin a work with just a title - I rarely have a sense of the form or the length of the work as I begin. Generally, somewhere along the line I notice the work taking a shape, and I finish it according to that pattern.

In addition to these writings, I have completed two more collections of religious songs using standard, folk-like guitar chords. Verses of songs continue to flow from my soul, and I continue to note them in recording as they come... And so the measure of songs mounts up.

So, through the grace and mercy of God and the power and peace of the Holy Spirit, I have been granted all this inspiration and the ability and the light to fulfill it. The Lord continues to bless me nightly with a chapter of this autobiography, and I am now fast-

approaching its end - even as the year draws to a close (and the new Church year begins).

Thank you, Lord, for watching over me. Though so often I have deserved the removal of your presence from me, yet you have stayed by my side and guided my hand - may you always be with me, O God.

11

What have we left to treat? I have in this hour completed reading Venerable Louis of Grenada's *Sinner's Guide* and therein found much in want of improvement about myself. I see particularly how vain imaginings have kept me blind to the reality around me. In these vain imaginings is a pride most untoward which does lead to occasions of judgment, anxiety, and a general lack of love for my neighbor.

I believe it was to teach me how blind and vain I have been that the Lord allowed me to be beaten by a heavy hand very recently. I went out to jog one night - though I had not the light with me and I should have exercised better judgment. While circling the park, I noticed a crowd of kids and young adults gathering in separate clusters. Coming around again, a couple of girls had just begun to fight, directly in my path. I jogged toward them, calling to them to stop, when I was grabbed from behind. It was dark, so I could not see my assailant clearly, but he immediately began beating me in the head; he hit me repeatedly before losing his grasp. Afterward, I said I was only trying to help, and continued jogging. (I think he was upset that I might spoil his fun of watching two girls fight - how far we can fall.)

My head was quite swollen, but I was all right - a little black and blue around the eyes for a few days. I do believe the Lord allowed me to be beaten, as he let Judah be warred upon by kingdoms from the North, to teach me to open my eyes, to chastise my imagination. (I had once before been beaten badly about the head, kicked actually, in the park by one of my neighborhood 'friends' when I was a teenager, but since then I had learned to carry the light of the Lord as protection - to walk without fear, even

in the valley of the shadow of death. But I was not prepared this night.)

On the phone, my father would ask me if I had forgotten that “discretion is the better part of valor” (the proverb actually struck me as something new), and his use of this expression reminded me of all the amusing and insightful phrases he is wont to use. He might also have said to me: “You’ve got a head like a sieve. Use it for something more than a hat rack. That’s why God gave it to you.”

My sinfulness, my lack of chastity, dost keep me from the possibility of finding a woman to be my wife, if that were so decreed by God. For by it I inevitably find myself attracted to women for the wrongest of reasons, thus dooming any hope of true love. And this futility is compounded by the fact that my vanity will then tell me I need not the company of a woman anyway. (But as the scales fall from my eyes, I see I am alone.)

So often have I failed; so often have I searched in vain because of the dark illusion made by my sin. (Wash me clean, O Lord!) But yet the Lord has blessed me with a sister, as I’ve said twice before. And in this, too, there is a story.

She is also a tutor, though a student as well and much younger than I. One day, shortly after our meeting early this year, we were playing and decided that she was my sister and I was her brother. She had said she always wanted a brother, and I said I needed a sister - so the agreement was easily reached. Previous to this decision, we had joked that she was from Pakistan (she had several Pakistani friends who had told her she looked so - though she is actually Peruvian), which I had found ironic because in my song *Poor Girl* a child from Pakistan carries her brother on her shoulder. (Other facts contributed to this irony as well.)

Since she was now my sister, I thought to give her a work of art I had for her on my sister’s birthday, which was coming shortly. As the appointed week arrived, I teased her by saying I had a present for her, but she wouldn’t get it till her birthday. She said, “How did you know it was my birthday?” It turned out her birthday was the day after my sister’s. (Curiously enough, I’ve always had difficulty remembering if my sister’s birthday is the 30th - which it is - or the 31st of March.)

Things became curiouser and curiouser when, upon looking at some photographs she'd brought in, I saw a bandage around one of her knees. She told me she had a chronic problem with her knee. (You'll recall my sister died because of her own trick knee.)

As each of these facts - and there are several others which I shall confine to conversation - was revealed, I would be left quite speechless and with my soul burning with the fire of truth. I am quite confident that, as my cat had been given to me as a kind of substitute for my sister, so this young woman is another such blessing from the Lord.

As space calls us to move on, let us treat of my professional life next. As I say, tutoring has proven a satisfactory compromise with necessity. Though it does present struggles during times of lengthy breaks from classes, I have learned through these struggles how to do with less, and how to trust even more in the Lord. This time also leaves more opportunity for art work - but I do still occasionally wonder if a steady job might not be more advisable. (I do pick up a night course here and there.) Then, of course, there is always the question of whether I should be working full-time on my art and writing, or if this is another vain imagining...

Recently, there was a concert of original music in my church in which I participated. This Thanksgiving celebration was a beautiful event, and it provided my first opportunity to play something from *Songs for Children of Light* for a sizable crowd. I had played a few of these 'glide guitar' songs and their broken chords (of which I am so unsure, but which I have been practicing steadily of late) at prayer meetings, but this was more of a performance.

I was not terribly well-prepared technically, but one song did come off reasonably well. It drew some positive comments, and I was well-pleased finally to be able to share my soul with others. (As it turned out, the concert was on the feast of St. Cecilia - the patron saint of church musicians - and I walked home that night with one of my mother's friends, Ceal, who gave me the kindest response to my song.)

I could not help but think of the joy I would find in being able to share music like this on a regular basis, and, if it is God's will, I pray He provide me the way to do so. But I should also not like to lose humility. (In the Hand of God let this be.)

Finally, let us treat our church service. This past week I attended a day of recollection held for ministers of the church in which the speaker stated that wearing more than one hat in your parish is not advisable. Since I wear at least four or five, this leaves much food for thought. I do feel as if I may be too active, and so may need to seek resolution of this situation. What should go and what should stay I cannot say, however.

Also, upon my mind at times is the question of a possible call to religious life. Does the Lord wish this for me? Must I make a decision to this end? Where shall I go from here?

So, though there may be a certain balance to my days, it should be clear that change is always possible.

12

The angels are watching over us. They hold us up lest we should stumble; and when we fall, they are there to clean the mess we have made. As we are to watch over the children, as we are to care for the animals and the Earth, so do the angels guard our lives.

Speak the truth and the angels shall be there. Say the truest words a man can speak: "I am a sinner," and you shall be made free. For then the angels shall come, then the hands of God shall cleanse your soul.

The angel Wisdom has been with me throughout my life. Only today do I see this; only today are my eyes opened to the presence of the angel that protects me. In her is my hope. By her grace I may come to Jesus, I may find the Father.

"Listen, my child, and accept my judgment
do not reject my counsel.
Put your feet into her fetters,
and your neck into her collar.

Bend your shoulders and carry her,
and do not fret under her bonds.
Come to her with all your soul,
and keep her ways with all your might.”
Sirach 6: 23-26

I have of late been blessed with austerities from the Lord - the Lord chastises those whom He loves. I have taken to sleeping on cushions on the floor (most days), thus denying my body luxury. I have taken to fasting on bread and water two days a week (as per the request of the Blessed Mother through the vision at Medjugorje), thus finding inroads to conquer carnality. I also limit myself to an hour of television (or radio) per day, thus keeping a measure of purity from the world's influence. I pray these practices may always possess the blessing intended by the Spirit of Wisdom, and never be done in vain.

And more do I ask from the Lord; more do I seek the favors of Wisdom. For one day we shall be carried to Heaven, one day our glory shall be made complete in the presence of our LORD. One day we shall find His Name written upon our hearts, and we shall become part of His holy Light. But as long as we are here, as long as we are but human... until we become like the angels who carry us, I know we are yet sinners, and there is still greater progress to be made.

James H. Kurt
December 14, 1995

AFTERWORD

Yes, my only home is heaven, and heaven is yet so far off: I still have so far to go. And the closer I draw to it, the further it seems to be. For I have made certain strides in the month of this new year. Applying myself to confession and penance and the daily reception of the Blessed Sacrament, I have found greater purity and love in my life. And yet there is so much remaining to be done - how far from perfect I am.

Have I told you about my hands. (The redness of my hands was the first thing my close friend noticed about me upon our meeting in line at baseball tryouts when we were but eight or nine years old.) Have I told you that I feel the wounds of Christ in my hands - sometimes very strongly. This sense was especially strong when I was composing *Songs for Children of Light* - particularly during those first two years. The center of the palms of my hands will throb when I am in concentration about Christ.

And when deep in thought, deep in prayer, the red birthmark on my forehead will become most apparent. And I can feel its warmth, I can feel its light - it is as a third eye.

And even when in college I recall how I would bleed inside at sunset. (How the death of this life cleanses our souls.) And in all these instances, how the Spirit of Truth lacerates my soul.

There is a call here - to serve the Lord. I only pray I shall be faithful to it. I only pray that when the time comes to go home, I shall be awake and ready.

Peace to you.

In Christ's Name,

James H. Kurt

1/25/96