

**Through Your Eyes, Lord**  
**Ruined by Porn**  
**Restored by Grace**

by Jeff Klazura

Through Your Eyes, Lord  
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by Jeff Klazura  
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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to Our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Medjugorje, who held me close by her side, as she brought me to her Son, Jesus. Thank you for your love for me. I love you very much.

I dedicate this book to Jesus. Thank you for Your mercy and forgiveness, and for Your love for me. Thank You for rescuing and restoring me. Thank You for Your footprints in the sand. I love You very much.

I dedicate this book to my parents, in thanksgiving for walking this journey with me, right by my side; in your support, in your strength, in your sacrifice, in your mercy, and in your agape love for me. I love you very much.

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## **Introduction**

Do you know that you can be breaking the law just by clicking on a website? Do you know you can be arrested, convicted and sent to jail, even if you didn't know it was against the law? If all your internet browsing was made public, to your family, friends, co-workers, community, and to the Prime Time News, how would that affect your life?

In 2002, I was a highly successful young teacher doing exactly the profession I loved, and it all got ripped away when the FBI arrested me for ordering pornographic pictures off the internet. Losing everything, experiencing jail, and being despised by many, I plunged into the depths of despair and fear. However, when I was thrown down, I gracefully landed on my back, causing me to look up to God. I turned to Him 100%, in every aspect of my life, as my day to day living became days of constant prayer. Throughout my prayer journey, the spiritual world was revealed to me, from visually coming face to face with demons to physically meeting my guardian angel. As I progressed through my spiritual rehabilitation, as well as my government enforced rehabilitation, I became freed from my many years of addiction to pornography. When I was arrested, in 2002, internet pornography was just starting. Now, in 2021, with 30,000 people viewing pornography every second, it has become an evil that is in full force, wreaking havoc throughout the world.

The week before being arrested and having my sins exposed for the nation to see, I prayed a prayer asking God to show me my sins through His eyes. This book is my personal testimony that covers my addiction, my arrest and process through the court system, my personal journey and interactions, my spiritual journey to recovery, and how God made all things new for me, beyond anything I could have dreamed up on my own.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Background Information**

My wife and I were standing outside the elementary school waiting to pick up one of our children. While waiting, I noticed a fellow parent wearing a t-shirt that read, "Everybody has a Story." As my years progress, and I interact and meet more people, I find this to be so true. Everybody has a story. I have learned that life presents itself with a lot of joyful moments, but also with a lot of sorrows. Life is full of wonderful achievements, but also with many struggles and trying times. Some of those struggles might be short lived, while others may be long winded and are life changing. That is my story. A life changing event. A tribulation.

Before I take you down my journey, there is some information that you will need to know. After being thrown down on my back, and forced to look up to God, I found a lot of spiritual help and guidance in the messages given by Mary, the Mother of God, through different apparitions. Throughout this book, you will see little inserts that contain these messages. To give completeness to my story, I feel it is an important part to include these messages. Of course, you are not required to believe in apparitions, or in the messages presented. However, when you read these messages, you will see that the teachings from them are very sound.

Most of the messages presented in this book come from the apparitions that have been taking place in Medjugorje, Bosnia (former Yugoslavia). In having completeness to the sharing of my story to you, it is going to be important for me to give you a brief background of these apparitions.

On June 25, 1981, Our Lady appeared to six young children of Medjugorje. These children ranged in age from ten years old all the way up to sixteen years old. She has been appearing to these children ever since. In these apparitions, she has been giving personal messages to these children. Our Lady has also been giving messages to the visionaries to give to the world. All of the messages given are for the entire world. They are not for a specific religion, race, or culture. Every message begins with her saying, "Dear children." This is because she is a mother to all of us. She is not only Jesus' mother, but she is our mother as well. As our mother, her love for us is so great that she wants to take us to her Son. The messages focus on calling us to prayer, fasting, penance, conversion and peace.

So the obvious question is why the Blessed Mother has been appearing to these children for the last forty years, and continues to do so today? As the visionaries claim, it is a preparation time of conversion for what is to take place. The Blessed Mother has been giving individual secrets to each visionary. Each visionary will receive a total of ten secrets, given at different times throughout their life. These secrets are explanations of major global events that will occur. They are said to be mostly about great chastisements. Through these chastisements, the world will return to a global peace, united in the heart. The visionaries are not to share these secrets until the time destined to do so. Once all the visionaries receive all ten secrets, it is said that the secrets will start to unfold. As of writing this book, three visionaries have received all ten secrets, while the other three visionaries have received nine of the ten secrets. In preparation, Our Lady has been giving messages to the world. We are to live these messages in our daily lives. These

messages call us to conversion in peace, and to pray, pray, pray, which she constantly repeats over and over again.

Over the years, there have been a lot of scientific and psychological tests done on the visionaries, during and outside of the apparitions. Through all those tests, each scientist and doctor agrees that something supernatural is happening. Outside of those tests, there are some other reasons why these apparitions seem to be for real, and are of God. First of all, I do not know of any place where six children, aged ten to sixteen, voluntarily pray for three hours every day, ever since the apparitions began, which is followed by praying all fifteen decades of the Rosary. Secondly, these same children are in a joy as they fast on bread and water each Wednesday and Friday. Some of them even fast on other days. If these claimed apparitions were nothing more than children playing make-believe, they would have tired from these daily prayer habits a long time ago. Thirdly, I do not know of any place in the world where millions of people are converted to a strong faith in Christ. And lastly, is my personal experience as to why I believe these apparitions are for real.

In the year 1987, when I was fifteen years old, my older brother and sister received a college graduation gift from my parents. It was a trip to go to Medjugorje. My brother, not much into that kind of stuff, was more interested in receiving the cash equivalent to the gift. However, upon returning from that trip, they displayed great excitement, joy and peace. They felt so fortunate to experience such a wonderful trip. Their stories and experiences have stayed in my heart and in my mind ever since. What everyone wanted to know, right when they came back home, was whether they saw any miracles; for it is claimed that people who visit the site of the apparitions in Medjugorje will possibly see a miracle. My brother and sister did see miracles. However, they were more excited to try to explain the feeling of peace and love they experienced rather than the miracles they witnessed. My brother came back very strong in his faith, renewed to a new level. My sister also had a renewed growth in her faith. However, we were all excited to hear about the miracles they saw.

They both saw the dancing of the sun. This is a common miracle the visitors (pilgrims) experience. The sun will pulsate, move around, and even turn into the figure of a host with a cross in the middle of it. There are other claimed miracles with the sun as well. With all the other pilgrims, my brother and sister stared directly at the sun for several minutes as they witnessed it dancing in the sky. As any logical person knows, you should never look directly into the sun. This was one of the miracles they experienced. My brother and sister, along with several other pilgrims, also witnessed the large thirty-five foot cement cross, located on top of Mount Krizevac, spin around and do a dance. Mount Krizevac is the famous hill located in this small village of Medjugorje. These stories were amazing, but my sister's story of a starry night was one that stuck with me throughout the years.

It was nighttime, and my sister was walking towards the church to go to Mass. As she looked around, she saw that all the lights were red. The candles, the streetlights, and the headlights on the cars were all red. As she looked in the night sky, she noticed that the moon and all the stars were also red. She immediately thought that she had received eye damage from looking at the sun earlier in the day. She went back to her room to phone for some medical help. As she entered the room, she noticed that the indoor lights were all shining the normal white light. She then went to the window, looked outside, and

again she saw all the outside lights were red. This was a story that has been very moving to me. However, my brother and sister kept wishing that we could understand the peace and love they experienced instead of focusing on the miracles. So that in effect, seems like even a greater miracle. Upon their return, they brought back some trinket gifts for us, and my sister gave me a cute little rosary, which plays an important part in my story I am going to share with you.

As you can see, the apparitions and messages at Medjugorje have meant a lot to me. It was especially during my trying times that they had an even more important part in my life. I decided to include these messages in my book because of one specific message that penetrated my heart and mind. It made me feel compelled to write my story, so that through my experience, Our Lady's messages could be brought to others. On May 8, 1986, our Blessed Mother gave the following message to the visionaries in Medjugorje:

***Medjugorje message of May 8, 1986 -- Dear children, you are responsible for the messages. The source of grace is here, but you, dear children, are the vehicles transmitting the gifts. Dear children, I am calling you to give the gift to others with love and not to keep it for yourselves. Thank you for having responded to my call.***<sup>1</sup>

As an even further confirmation, I had a powerful experience on January 1st, 2021. I had written this very book, years ago, but it just sat in the attic. I had spiritual promptings to proceed forward with this book, but I never followed through on those promptings. The years passed, and it just sat, until this year.

Every year, on New Year's Day, my wife and I, with our five children, go to morning Mass, followed by a family ritual. We go before the statue of Mary, say some family prayers for the upcoming year, and then we ask the Holy Spirit to guide our hands as we dig into a bag full of slips of paper. We pick a saint, every year, to be our saint for the year. We mix up the bag full of saint's names and randomly pick one out of the bag. Prior to this specific New Year's Day, 2021, I had been struggling for several months, as to whether the Apparitions of Medjugorje were for real or not. It was a spiritual struggle that persisted for months. Then came New Year's Day. After Mass, I went with my family to the statue of Mary, as we pulled out our saints for the year. I pulled mine out, and was overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit as I read my slip. It was "Our Lady of Medjugorje, Queen of Peace", and the note on my slip said, "Help make our Lady's messages known to others."

As you read this book, you will come across an indented paragraph labeled with a "Date". This is a reference to a message given to the visionaries at Medjugorje, which had a profound impact on me during the events happening in my life. Everybody has a story, and I hope my story will help you in your own journey, whatever that story may entail.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Entrenched in a Battle**

#### **- My Double Life -**

It was a typical day for me. I was fresh into my career as a 5th grade teacher, teaching the two subjects that I loved the most, Religion and Science. I was in a perfect situation. I was doing what I loved to do, so in effect, my job wasn't really a job. I had always been told that if I chose a job I loved, then I would never work a day in my life. I found this to be true as I entered my career of teaching children. I enjoyed my every day interactions with the teachers I taught with, and the awe inspired children I taught.

Ever since I was a fifth grader I wanted to become a teacher. It was a childhood dream of mine. God blessed me with many gifts to be used in the teaching profession. He gave me a natural talent of teaching. He gave me great creativity and a wonderful artistic ability. This artistic ability helped in my teaching, as the lessons on the chalkboard would always come alive. Many students told me that they had difficulty understanding certain concepts, but once I drew it out, they fully understood. Along with an artistic and creative ability, God filled me with wisdom and knowledge, accompanied by a quick, humorous wit that kept the classroom alive. He gave me endurance and perseverance to accomplish the many difficult tasks of a teacher. He gave me the gift of peace to deal with every day encounters. And He gave me an aspiration to pass along those gifts to others.

Once I entered my teaching career, I was passionate about my job from day one. As each day went by, my motivation and ideas forged ahead. I looked forward to being in the classroom. Wednesday, March 13th, 2002, was just another typical day for me. Once the school day was finished, I went home to continue my job as a teacher. I laid out the work that needed to be accomplished for the night. I had a couple hundred worksheets to grade, in which I would also put forth additional effort writing comments of praise, and drawing fun little pictures to boost confidence in the students. I also had to type a set of notes to be used for the next lesson, as well as create a fun science lab and worksheet on the computer. I was really good at multitasking. I went to my computer room, and began my typical routine.

This was about the timeframe when the personal computer was starting to become popular. I owned two computers, and would work on both of them at the same time. However, this computer room was very symbolic of a double life that I was living. I lived a life entrenched in a personal battle. On one computer I would do all my school preparations, and on the other computer, I would search the internet for erotic pictures. On one hand, I was proud of all the wonderful lessons and activities I planned, organized, and created. On the other hand, I had shame for the other side of my life I was living, which consisted of my addictions.

***Medjugorje message of March 25, 1987 "Dear children! Today I am grateful to you for your presence in this place, where I am giving you special graces. I call each one of you to begin to live as of today that life which God wishes of you and to begin to perform good works of love and mercy. I do not want you, dear children, to live the message and be committing sin which is displeasing to me. Therefore, dear children, I want each of you to live a new life***

*without destroying all that God produces in you and is giving you. I give you my special blessing and I am remaining with you on your way of conversion. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>1</sup>

The problem with this life that I lived was that it was a double life. On the outside, the part of my life that was presented to everyone I knew, was displayed a life of being a wonderful and creative teacher who cared deeply for his students. A teacher who wanted to make sure school was fun. A teacher who had great enthusiasm for what he did, and who had a great love for teaching the faith. This was the life that was apparent to many of those I came in contact with. The other part of my life, which I kept in secret, which no one knew about, consisted of the addictions I had.

The seeds for those immoral addictions were planted in me at a young age, when I was six years old. It all started when an older child showed me things about sexuality that my innocent mind never knew. Seeds were planted in my soul that would be destined to destroy my plants of innocence that began to grow. At that young age, I didn't know that those actions were bad. I liked the physical feeling. My sexual switch was turned on at a very early age, in a very unhealthy way. I didn't have sexual feelings when I was taught that stuff, but the seeds were planted. Then, when I entered puberty, those seeds began to grow as I took what I experienced and began expanding on those experiences.

I have always been a visual person, which I believe stems from my artistic disposition. My immoral habit of looking at erotic pictures began with the advertisement section in the Sunday newspaper, or the lingerie and underwear section in the Big Box Retailer Catalogs. I would also thumb through fashion and swimsuit magazines while I was at the library, after school. As I looked at those pictures, it brought on a feeling of excitement and euphoria. Those feelings made me want to search out more. And thus, it became a habit. This was a habit that formed early and continued to grow throughout my life. I began feeling that it was wrong. I always kept it a secret, which was proof that I knew it was wrong. I had a personal, moral, and spiritual struggle, but I always kept it inside, as a secret.

During my college years, that addiction grew as I joined in the buying of Playboy magazines, and Swimsuit Illustrated magazines. My search for erotic pictures escalated. In hindsight, there is a Bible verse that shows how this happens. Psalm 1:1 says, "Blessed is the man who does not **walk** in the counsel of the wicked, or **stand** in the way of sinners, or **sit** in the seat of mockers."

The three words that stand out in this Bible verse are, "Walk, Stand and Sit". In my search for erotic pictures, I would see something that would shock me, as it was something I had never seen before (I was **walking** in the counsel of the wicked). Then, the next time I saw something similar to what I had seen, I was a little more desensitized by it and would not flee from it (I was **standing** in the way of the sinner). Finally, I found myself accepting it as normal with a desensitized conscience of looking through the magazines on purpose (I was **sitting** in the seat of the mockers).

A great example of this was when I held a summer job as a hotel maintenance man. One of the long-term coworkers had a huge stash of hard-core pornographic magazines, hidden in the maintenance boiler room. I held the evening shift, working as the solo maintenance man. When I came across those magazines, I was shocked at the pictures. I had never seen pictures like that. When I saw them, I was shocked, but also had that

intense pulse pounding feeling. Then, the next time I saw them, I was less shocked, and found myself paging through the magazines, until I finally was accepting of it, as not that big of a deal. I guess it is Satan's little plan, to shock you when you first see something, only to be a little less shocked the next time you see it, and finally to be accepting of it; at which point he will then shock you on the next level, which eventually becomes not so shocking over time; and this is how it all escalates. Just look at our world, and how so many things that were shocking 40 years ago are now accepted as the norm.

What I also realized, a little too late, is that any lifestyle of habitual sin will usually attract "friends" who are also living lives of habitual sin, whether they are the same habits or not. This is exactly what happened to me, as I was introduced and became addicted to marijuana. Upon reading this, Marijuana is considered legal, as a recreational drug, in many parts of our country. Maybe that is just another example of Satan shocking us, to the point where we just now accept it as the norm. But 20+ years ago, in the 1990's, it was not the norm.

During my first years of college, where I didn't know anyone, I entered into friendship with a certain group of guys. After a short time of strengthening this bond of friendship, I came to find out that they smoked marijuana on a regular basis. Since they were my new friends, and I didn't really know anyone else, I decided not to abandon the friendship I was gaining with them. I hung out with them, but decided not to participate in their smoking. However, as I observed their actions, I had an intrigue as to what they were experiencing. I guess I was at first shocked, but then became accepting of it. They just seemed very happy with so much laughter. I wanted to be part of that happiness and that laughter, and soon found myself joining in. Most of the stupid things I have done, I did because I was looking for an elevated experience, and an experience of happiness. Of course hindsight shows that I looked for it in the wrong places and in the wrong things.

As I observed those guys use marijuana, I noticed that they did not enter into an altered state of craziness, which is what I thought happened to all drug users. Instead, they seemed to really enjoy the effects, causing them to be really laid back, easy going, and happy. When they used this drug, I also noticed that they enjoyed doing things that I enjoyed, such as playing and listening to music, partaking in different games, and heading out into nature. I became intrigued and fascinated with what I observed. I knew God was speaking in my conscience, telling me, "*Have nothing to do with these men, and let them go*" (Acts 5:38). However, I did not listen to those words in my conscience, and I started joining in the smoking of marijuana, until it became an addiction. God gives us wisdom about this kind of company, of which I did not heed. God tells us, "*Be not deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals*" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

I enjoyed the results of smoking marijuana. It caused me to be really laid back, taking my mind off of any worries. It also intensified my talents and joys of the arts, whether it was playing my guitar or drawing my art. When I used that drug, I experienced a new level of creativity. Furthermore, it caused me to be more observant of my surroundings, which led to a new dimension of enjoyment in nature. With all those positive effects, I felt that I was not doing anything wrong. However, without really understanding the damage I was doing, I was adding fuel to the evil fire that I allowed to be ignited in my soul. I had entered into an addiction of selfish pleasure, which caused other addictions to arise. I was living a life of physical enjoyment that existed of living in a state of constant fantasy instead of living in reality. As those addictions grew, the virtue

of self-control weakened, which led to a domino effect in other virtues. Throughout my life, I tried kicking those bad habits, but just couldn't do it. I had always promised myself that I would quit those immoral habits once I started my teaching career. However, my teaching career came, and I was still engulfed in those addictions.

During my first year of teaching, a "friend", or as one of the Grateful Dead's song title says, "Friend of the Devil", (*the one who introduced me to marijuana*) thought that I could really do wonderful things if I had a computer. At that time, I was not too knowledgeable about personal computers. I had a Brother word processor which worked just fine for all the lesson plans I had to type up. However, one day he handed me a used computer, and gave it to me for free. I learned how to do wonderful things on that computer to aid in my teaching. However, that machine that helped amplify my creative teaching was also going to be a tool that would amplify my addiction in pornography.

That "friend", who gave me the computer, introduced me to the internet and showed me how to get access to pornographic pictures. There was an endless supply of pornography on the Internet. This was in the late 1990's, which, according to statistics, is nothing compared to what exists today. But at that time, it was an endless supply of erotic pictures that I could get for free, in the privacy of my own room, with no one ever knowing.

Looking at just a few of those pictures, whether it was by accident or not, caused temptations to enter my mind. Those temptations brought the sins of lust into play. Lustful desires easily mastered my mind and thus, my flesh. It was during those temptations in which I would forget all about God. But God tells us over and over, throughout the Bible, to flee from temptation. There are other temptations that we can fight, but in the temptation of lust, the answer is to high-tail it out of there and flee from it. God does not give a long explanation on how to resist the temptation of lust, but simply tells us to flee! So, if lust and impurity is a fault of yours, and if pictures arise on your computer or on your television, flee from them, or you will enter into that temptation, forgetting all about God. When lustful temptations enter into the mind, flee from what you are doing and get your mind on something else. Otherwise, you will fulfill your feelings of lust. Flee from the lust found on television. Flee from the lust plastered on the internet. Flee from the lustful thoughts that pop into your mind. Flee from premarital sex. Flee from extramarital affairs. Flee from all the lusts of the world. Flee!

There is no other way to fight this temptation but to flee from it, which is what I did not do. It is like a poisonous serpent. If I came across a rattlesnake on a hiking path, I am not going to stick around and try to fight it. I am going to flee from it. In the same way, lust is poisonous. I needed to tell Satan that what he was offering was poisonous, and to drink the poison himself, and flee. I, however, never did that. Instead, I engrossed myself in those temptations. It was at those times that I forgot all about God. However, it was after the fact in which I remembered God, in which feelings of guilt, embarrassment and self-hatred would always come into play. That is how the sin of lust always works. During the lustful temptations, you forget about God, but once you fulfill your desire, that is when the acknowledgement of God comes into play. And each time one feeds their desire of lust, their soul becomes just a little bit more corrupt, making it easier to forget about God, and forget about fleeing, which is what happened to me.

Before I knew it, I had opened my heart and soul to a new level of sin. The weeds of evil began taking over the garden of my inner soul, and my addiction worsened. With

internet access to erotic pictures, in the privacy of my dark room, I had added a new type of fuel to the fire of sin that was burning within my soul. This fuel was not kindling, or pieces of wood. Instead, it was literally gallon after gallon of pure gasoline. I constantly fought myself with this double life. I would try to conquer that addiction in many ways. I would listen to religious tapes, watch religious videos, and even put religious articles in front of my computer. There were times when I disconnected internet service for a few months, just to get that sin out of my life. However, the thing that I failed to do, the thing that truly pulls people out of their addictions, was to take time for unceasing prayer and repentance.

***Medjugorje message of July 25, 1996 "Dear children! Today I invite you to decide every day for God. Little children, you speak much about God, but you witness little with your life. Therefore, little children, decide for conversion, that your life may be true before God, so that in the truth of your life you witness the beauty God gave you. Little children, I invite you again to decide for prayer because through prayer, you will be able to live the conversion. Each one of you shall become in the simplicity, similar to a child which is open to the love of the Father. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>2</sup>

I would go to confession, but soon began to think that my going to confession was worthless. The reason I felt that way was because I would fall right back into the temptation, and pick up my sins right where I left off. I felt like there was no true "resolve" to avoid those occasions of sin. Because I stopped frequenting confession, those additional actions allowed evil to enter with a greater force, causing me to see my sins through the eyes of Satan. My knowledge began to fool me. I began to believe that since my addictions were not hurting anyone else, then it wasn't that serious of a sin. Because I had let Satan into my heart, my spiritual vision was headed on a road to blindness.

***Medjugorje message of September 25, 1991 "Dear children! Today in a special way I invite you all to prayer and renunciation. For now as never before Satan wants to show the world his shameful face by which he wants to seduce as many people as possible onto the way of death and sin. Therefore, dear children, help my Immaculate Heart to triumph in the sinful world. I beseech all of you to offer prayers and sacrifices for my intentions so I can present them to God for what is most necessary. Forget your desires, dear children, and pray for what God desires, and not for what you desire. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>3</sup>

I just could not break the addiction. I was missing the key factor that would lead me out of this addiction, which was to flee from the sin of lust through unceasing prayer. However, I just couldn't find time for that. I figured that my prayer life was fulfilled by using my time and talent to be a great teacher. I felt I was living a holy life because of

what I did as a teacher. I felt this holy life was just as good as spending time each day in prayer. However, holy actions do not necessarily mean that one is holy. I had a long way to grow in holiness. I had a long way to grow in my relationship with God, which is accomplished through taking time each day to separate myself from my daily activities, spending that time in prayer. However, I just didn't have time. I had hundreds of papers to grade, worksheets to create, lessons to plan, and activities to organize. Furthermore, I also had an addiction to feed. Therefore, I just couldn't find time for that intense prayer life that I needed in order to conquer my addictions. It was truly a hypocritical life I was living, which is a life God despises, for God tells us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, did we not do mighty deeds in your name? Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'" (Matthew 7: 21-23)

*Medjugorje message of September 25, 1992 "Dear children! Today again I would like to say to you that I am with you also in these troubled days during which **Satan wishes to destroy all that my Son Jesus and I are building. He desires especially to destroy your souls. He wants to take you away as far as possible from the Christian life and from the commandments that the Church calls you to live. Satan wishes to destroy everything that is holy in you and around you. This is why, little children, pray, pray, pray to be able to grasp all that God is giving you through my coming. Thank you for having responded to my call.**"*

On the outside, Jesus Christ was my God; but on the inside, He really wasn't. Instead of worshipping the one true God I had taught about daily in my classroom, I had been worshipping a combination of false gods. My god was the internet. My god was my job. My god was the children I taught. My god was doing things to get positive feedback from others. My god was my pride. My god was self-pleasure. And all of these gods were false promises of the evil one. However, I continued to hide most of those false gods on the outside, and would always display that Jesus Christ was my God. And in a way, He was. But again, I was living a double life.

Jesus Christ was my God when I had time for Him. Jesus Christ was my God when I taught about Him to the students, or when I talked about Him to others. I would often have people tell me, "Wow, you sure are holy. You sure know a lot about Jesus and your faith." It was true. I did know a lot about Jesus. However, because of my sinful interior life, I was not currently in a close relationship with Jesus. I knew a lot about Him, but so does Satan and all his minions. They know all about Jesus, which allows them to better accomplish their job of pulling people away from Him. And I did know a lot about Jesus, but was not really walking hand in hand with Him. It was a constant battle of my double life.

*Medjugorje message of January 25, 2002 "Dear children! At this time while you are still looking back to the past year I call you, little children, to look deeply into your heart and to decide to be closer to*

*God and to prayer. **Little children, you are still attached to earthly things and little to spiritual life.** May my call today also be an encouragement to you to decide for God and for daily conversion. **You cannot be converted, little children, if you do not abandon sins** and do not decide for love towards God and neighbor. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>5</sup>*

## Chapter 3

### The Truth Will Set You Free

Now then, let's go back to Wednesday, March 13th. It was a typical day for me. I had finished teaching for the day, and I found myself in my computer room working on both computers. I was making a particularly creative activity and work-sheet on one computer. However, on the other computer, I was feeding my immoral habit. Again my discipline failed me. *"As the dog returns to his vomit, so the fool repeats his folly."* (Proverbs 26:11)

It was late at night and I had not yet eaten dinner. I decided to get some fast food, which was yet another routine in my lifestyle. My poor eating habits were just another sign of the other poor habits I was living. During my drive, I turned on the radio and began listening to a Christian radio station. They had a notably good Christian speaker who was talking about sin. This speaker explained that when we get so engrossed in habitual sin, it is hard to see those particular actions as sin. It really moved me spiritually, and in my car I said a prayer that was a little different from my usual prayers. My usual prayers typically involved asking God to give me the strength and will to stop my sinful addiction. However, those were quick little prayers, and it usually did not involve deep and meaningful effort to stop the sin. Typically, when I truly entered into deep prayer with God, I would usually be asking Him to work through me as I taught His children. Daily, I would ask God to help me be a good teacher, as He was the Ultimate Teacher, the Ultimate Good Shepherd. I would ask God to reflect His love, wisdom, and kindness through me to all those with whom I came in contact. He answered those prayers each day, which is why people thought I was so holy, and such a great teacher. However, I would seldom put that type of deep and intimate prayer into my sinful life until that Wednesday night.

After listening to the Christian speaker talk about the sinful lives we live, I began a deep and sincere prayer to God. I knew I was living a secret life of sin. I knew I had to stop living that life. However, I got to the point where I could no longer see the seriousness of my sins. I was spiritually blinded. I asked God to show me my sins in a way that He sees them. I knew my addictions were sinful. However, because I had become so engrossed in those habits, I just couldn't see the seriousness of those sins. I couldn't see how it was impacting my life. I couldn't see how it affected others. I just couldn't see. I had become blind. So I asked God, "Lord, please show me my sins the way You see them. Help me to see my sinfulness through your eyes. Help me to see how to abandon this sinful life. Heal me of my spiritual blindness." As we all know, God answers our prayers, and He was on His way to answer this one.

When I got home that Wednesday night, I had a strong resolve to avoid those sinful behaviors; a resolve I had not had in a long time. However, I remembered an order I placed for some pictures that were to be delivered in a few days. I just thought to myself that I would immediately throw those pictures away upon receiving them. I truly felt that I was going to conquer the sin of pornography. However, how can one conquer such a serious habit without unceasing prayer each and every day, which is what I later came to realize (a little too late in the standards of human life, but never too late in the standards of the spiritual life).

*Medjugorje message of February 25, 1992 "Dear children! Today I invite you to draw still closer to God through prayer. Only that way will I be able to help you and to protect you from every attack of Satan. I am with you and I intercede for you with God, that He protect you. But I need your prayers and your "Yes." You get lost easily in material and human things, and forget that God is your greatest friend. Therefore, my dear little children, draw close to God so He may protect you and guard you from every evil. Thank you for having responded to my call!"<sup>1</sup>*

The following day, Thursday, March 14th came. I was excited for the day because we were watching my favorite video about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It was a six-hour video that my class had been watching throughout the year. Since Spring Break was the upcoming week, and since Holy Week was the following week, I wanted to get to the part of the movie right before the Last Supper. That way, we would be able to watch the passion and resurrection during Holy Week. Ironically enough, the last section of the movie we watched was all about how Herodias, the unlawful wife of King Herod, had her young daughter, Salome, perform an erotic dance for King Herod, resulting in the beheading of John the Baptist.

The day was yet another good day. I just loved being in the classroom, sharing my gifts God gave me. However, when I got home, I found myself doing my regular routine as I started searching for pictures. Again, my discipline failed me. But when I checked on the status of the order of the pictures I had ordered, God gave me a little additional strength to stop what I was doing. Through an email, I was informed that my order was being investigated as to whether the pictures violated the company's terms and agreements. Violation?! Investigation?! I didn't understand. I never considered them to be illegal since they consisted of a non-nude female who was in a shirt and underwear. But I decided to send a cancellation of my order. Then, I stopped searching the Internet before I got too wrapped up in it. I logged off the computer and began organizing an art activity. It again was a late night, and I did the fast-food run. During my drive, I again was listening to the Christian radio station. It was another good talk. The last thing I remembered hearing during that talk was the phrase, "The truth will set you free." And that simple phrase stuck in my mind.

Then came Friday, March 15th. It was the last day of school before Spring Break. Many students and teachers were always excited for Spring Break, but to be honest with you, I was not too excited. I just loved being in the classroom. I loved teaching every day. I loved it so much because I had made it my god. Therefore, I wasn't too excited for Spring Break. However, there was one thing I was excited to do over the break, which was to make the video yearbooks for each student. Throughout the year, I would video record little segments of the students doing fun and interesting activities. I would then put all those video segments together, and compose a tape for each student to keep at the end of the year. I had over three hours of video, and seventy-five tapes to create. To help the progress, I borrowed all the VCR's from the school. I went home, immediately set up the VCRs, and began taping. My living room was like an obstacle course of seven VCRs and seventy-five tapes, with wires leading everywhere, as I was simultaneously recording

seven tapes at once (This was before the age of DVDs, let alone the age of digital videos). I then had a knock at the door. It was the postman.

When I opened the door and received the package the postman delivered, I saw a new neighbor moving into the apartment right across from me. Thinking that I could be neighborly, I greeted my new neighbor, welcomed him to the community, and offered him help in moving any heavy furniture. I then took the package I received from the postman, and I went inside. When I opened the package, I saw that it was those pictures that I ordered off the Internet. I simply assumed that there was no problem with the pictures, especially since the company delivered them after I had requested a cancellation of the order if the pictures violated the terms and agreements. However, I did remember telling myself that I would throw those pictures away right when I received them, but my temptation once again took over. I did not throw them away. A little time passed, and I was continuing to work on the video yearbooks. Then I heard another knock at the door. I immediately thought it was the new neighbor who needed some help carrying in some furniture. I quickly climbed over my obstacle course of VCR's and tapes, and when I OPENED THE DOOR, my life began on an entirely NEW PATH.

*Medjugorje message of March 25, 1992 "Dear children! Today as never before I invite you to live my messages and to put them into practice in your life. I have come to you to help you and, therefore, I invite you to change your life because you have taken a path of misery, a path of ruin. When I told you: convert, pray, fast, be reconciled, you took these messages superficially. You started to live them and then you stopped, because it was difficult for you. No, dear children, when something is good, you have to persevere in the good and not think: God does not see me, He is not listening, He is not helping. And so you have gone away from God and from me because of your miserable interest. I wanted to create of you an oasis of peace, love and goodness. God wanted you, with your love and with His help, to do miracles and, thus, give an example. Therefore, here is what I say to you: Satan is playing with you and with your souls and I cannot help you because you are far away from my heart. Therefore, pray, live my messages and then you will see the miracles of God's love in your everyday life. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>2</sup>

It wasn't my neighbor needing help moving furniture. Instead, it was a group of six FBI agents and a search warrant. They quickly entered my apartment, presented the search warrant to me, sat me down, and began their search. Since the pictures were just delivered to me, I knew why they were there; but I honestly did not know that I broke any law. Everything I searched and ordered off the Internet said it was legal. But the fact of the matter is that I broke the most important law, God's law.

I started reading through the search warrant, which stated what they were looking for. However, I wasn't really reading the search warrant. Instead, I was praying fervently to God. As I was doing so, the message He sent to me the previous day from the radio station stuck in my mind, "THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE" (John 8:32). So I told

the investigators that I knew what they were looking for. I pointed out to them where the pictures were located, on my kitchen table underneath my jacket. Immediately, the intensity of the search started to mellow. I then asked the female investigator if I would still be able to teach. She looked at me with eyes that pierced my heart, and she did not answer that question. I was in immediate shock with so much happening in my mind. Two of the investigators began asking me questions while the others continued searching through all items in my apartment. This next statement may seem shocking, but the two investigators that questioned me were like angels. I did not see any of them as angels at the time, but as I look back, they truly were like angels. They were calm, peaceful, kind, and concerned; and most importantly, they were there to set me free from the bonds of sin I was living.

Throughout their questioning, the only thing that stuck in my mind was, "THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE." After several questions about this habitual life I was living, they asked me if I did any drugs. I told them that I smoked marijuana, and showed them where my stash was. After some whispering amongst themselves, they decided to call in the local police to deal with the marijuana issue. They continued to question me, and every question they asked, I answered with complete honesty. My sinful and secretive life was laid out in front of them.

As they continued searching the apartment, I was concerned about what they were thinking when they saw the seven VCRs and 75 videotapes. I could sense from three of the investigators, a drooling excitement, thinking that they had just uncovered a pornography studio happening right there in my apartment. To put myself at ease, and to try to change some of their prejudgments of me, I explained to them what the videos were. I guess I was hoping that they would see the good side to me, and everything would be alright. However, as the interrogation continued, I realized that things were not alright. Anytime I tried to justify myself, or even in my explanation of the videotapes, there were two investigators that quickly combated my words with closed minds, as they returned forceful comments in their defense. Being in an intimidating ratio of six to one, I no longer tried to defend the situation. Like a lost child, I wanted to be comforted by my parents, so I asked if I could call them. They allowed me to do so.

When I called my parents, I received the answering machine. I left a message saying that something serious had happened, and I needed them to call me as soon as possible. After some more questioning, the phone rang, and I felt a scared relief. I answered it and told my parents that I needed them to come to my apartment. I told them that the police were here, and that it was very serious. When they arrived, I was allowed to go outside to see them. I immediately received loving and comforting hugs from them. I explained to them all about my sinful and secretive life. I immediately received their unconditional love, which I always thought existed only with God. I always thought that there were conditions to love. How can you love someone who does such terrible things? But they showed me a love that came straight from the Father and the Mother of God. I immediately began to feel a small burden be lifted. Then, the police officers that were going to deal with the marijuana had arrived. I was then brought back inside.

As my parents were ordered to stay outside, I went inside for more questioning and for the charges of the marijuana to be written up and signed. At this point, the pictures and computers were at a stage of investigation only. However, I could have gone to jail that night for the possession of marijuana. The police officers that wrote up the marijuana

citation seemed to have a desire to impress the FBI. They were displaying an arrogant attitude toward me. However, after the FBI agents whispered some words to the officers, their arrogant attitudes settled down. They were going to take me to jail, but changed their mind. I truly think that it was my honesty to the FBI that prevented my arrest that night. After the search, which I believe lasted three to four hours, had finished, I grabbed a couple clothes, a toothbrush, and I grabbed my Medjugorje rosary, which I had displayed on one of my walls. This was the little trinket rosary my sister gave to me as a gift when she returned from Medjugorje, back in 1987. This rosary was again very symbolic, for it was a beauty that was on display for people to see, just as my outside beauty was on display to see. However, I had not picked up that rosary in a very long time, which was symbolic of my inner and secretive life. I went with my parents, BACK to their HOME, and I mentioned to my dad, “Your prodigal son, whom you did not know had left, has returned home.”

That night, I still felt that I needed to let the truth out, and I felt that my principal, who was also a good friend, role model, and admirer of mine, should also know what had happened. I called her that night, but was only able to leave a message. I again called the next morning, and she was able to see me. However, she was just about to catch a plane to see her parents for Spring Break. I was so worried to tell her, knowing the hurt that I was going to place in her heart, and knowing that I was going to ruin her Spring Break, which had just begun. However, I had to let the truth out. Plus, I didn’t want to have her come back the day before school started up again, having to deal with this extreme situation.

When I met with her, and explained to her all that had happened, she, as usual, displayed compassion, with incredible strength. (*This was the same strength she showed through her struggle to beat her personal battle of cancer. I felt so bad that I was laying upon her another extreme battle that would affect her, right after her completion of the battle against her cancer.*) I explained to her that it was at a level of investigation only. I was hoping for her to tell me that it would all work out, and that I would be back in the classroom. However, after talking to the pastor of the school, which followed the meeting with the principal, I realized that I would not teach again. Such incredible sorrow and pain filled my heart. The kind of sorrow that I’m sure Jesus felt as I sinned every day, right in front of Him.

My parents and I were engrossed the following week in finding an attorney. Our first meeting with an attorney was when I realized how serious this was, in terms of the law. The crime they were trying to charge me with was considered a felony. They determined that the pictures were of a female under the age of 18, making it a crime of child pornography, which could lead to a Federal prison sentence of five years and a fine of \$250,000. That night, when we met with the attorney, I found out that the cost for him to help us was equivalent to buying a new house. Since I was about \$15,000 in debt, I had no money to do so. My parents took on the financial burden. I didn’t want to go to jail, but at the same time, I didn’t want my parents to have to do that; to be under such unnecessary stress that I brought upon them. I think about the burden that Mary, the mother of God, received as she stood by Jesus’ side, all through His suffering and death. And here, my parents were taking burden after burden, as they too began suffering my pains.

Since the cost was so extensive, we shopped around for different attorneys. And since the alleged crime involved recently created laws, there were not many attorneys that were proficient in that area. However, the first attorney we met seemed to be the best one. He was very familiar with those types of cases. Plus, he had defended a handful of people in similar and worse situations. To add a little motivation in our decision, he informed us that he attended the grade school at which I had been teaching.

Since all of this was at a level of investigation only, I was hoping that the Church would keep me in some type of position so that I would not be terminated, and so that I could have a continued income. However, the following Thursday answered those piercing thoughts. On Thursday, March 21st, after finishing some more attorney shopping, we arrived back home, only to be greeted by the two FBI agents that had questioned me on the night of the search warrant.

There were now official charges of child-pornography filed against me, and they were there to take me to jail. Immediate fear, tears, and anxiety filled my heart and mind. However, my mother counteracted those nervous feelings by taking her hands, placing them on both sides of my head, staring me in the eyes and said, "Think of this as a retreat." That thought calmed me as the FBI agents were ready to cart me off to prison. I do feel that God used those two agents to retrieve me from the sin I was living. However, I felt that those involved in making the decision to cart me to jail could have been more merciful. They knew where I was, and that I would not flee town. They knew I would show up to court for the charges. However, someone somewhere wanted to make it high profile to make sure that I would never teach again. They were making an example out of me. I partially felt that way because of what they told me and my parents on the night of the search warrant. They stated that they would take into consideration my honesty, my helpfulness, and my remorse. They said that if the pictures were considered illegal, they would serve me papers to appear in court instead of arresting and taking me to jail. They did not follow through on their word. They arrested me. In my mind, it just seemed like they were trying to make an example out of me. Their decision to arrest me was quick, abrupt, and was solely based on the pictures I had ordered, yet cancelled.

I had ordered thirteen pictures off the Internet. When I received an email from the company that was selling the photos, telling me that my order was under investigation as to whether they violated their terms and agreements, I told them to cancel the order. However, the cancellation of the order was ignored, and the pictures were delivered. The pictures consisted of an alleged minor, under the age of eighteen, wearing underwear and a dress-shirt/shawl. Eight of the pictures were not classified as pornography. However, five of the pictures were, simply because she was sitting on a bed, which implied sexuality. To inform you, the reader, with a short explanation of the crime of child pornography, the subject in the photos must be under the age of eighteen years old. There are four categories of child-pornography, all of which receive the same conviction. The first category consists of pictures that show intercourse with a minor. The second category consists of pictures that show masturbation of a minor. The third category consists of pictures that show bestiality, sadistic or masochistic abuse of a minor. And the fourth category consists of pictures that show a lascivious exhibition of the genitals of a minor. Typically, when a person hears the words "child-pornography", they relate it to one of the first three categories. However, the pictures I ordered did not show a display of any of those categories, but were alleged to be under the last category.

This last category of lascivious exhibition of the genitals has its own evaluation, which is an artistic interpretation. They first determined whether the focal point of the picture was on the genitals. Secondly, they determined whether the minor was displayed in an environment that denoted sexual connotation. Lastly, they determined whether the clothing or pose of the minor was intended to sexually arouse the viewer. The government officials that interpreted the artistic evaluation of the photographs determined that eight of the thirteen pictures I ordered were not considered to be under any of the child-pornography categories. However, since the remaining five pictures involved the alleged minor in a bedroom environment, they considered it to be child-pornography, since a bed is an environment that denotes sexual connotation. This bothered me because it was the same outfit as the other pictures they determined were not pornography. Plus, a couple of those pictures did not even show the genital area in the picture. Therefore, I did not understand how it could be considered as a lascivious display of the genitals. It also bothered me because I had cancelled my order for those pictures. And it even further bothered me because it was their interpretation that the subject was under eighteen years old. Every site I visited had a claim on their homepage stating that all the pictures in their website were legal in the United States.

There is an important note that I need to interject here. As you read some of my experiences and observations, you will see anger that was in me. Upon editing the book, I could easily recognize that anger. As you will see, later on in my journey, I came to realize that anger is used to justify one's actions, especially someone who is in addiction to something. Upon rereading and editing this book, I had a difficult decision as to whether I should take out all those parts that showed so much anger, or whether I should leave them in. I have decided to leave them in, because it helps tell the whole story and all that took place.

So, getting back to the story, it just felt like they were out to make an example of me, especially since I was a Catholic school Teacher. This idea was reinforced after my first contact with the media. My attorney and I exited the court building and the media came down the sidewalk. My attorney told me to walk to the car while he distracted them by asking them, "So, who are you guys here for?" At which the media responded with the two words that showed me that I was being used as an example as they responded, "The Catholic Teacher."

I knew what I did was morally wrong, but I truly did not feel I was breaking any laws. The pictures they were trying to prosecute me on were no different from pictures found in several books in the public library, depictions contained in Hollywood movies, or other depictions contained in a wide variety of popularly circulated advertisements. Truly thinking that I did not break any law, I was extremely upset at what was happening to me. However, let's get back to the moral aspect of it all, which is the fact that I knew my actions were immoral.

Because I was living this immoral hidden life, God had to reprimand me. He had to discipline my immoral actions. And when God disciplines us, we should rejoice because it shows us that He loves us. *"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when reprov'd by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges. Endure your trials as discipline; God treats you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have had our earthly*

*fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not then submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live? They disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but He does so for our benefit, in order that we may share His holiness. At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it. So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.” (Hebrews 12:9-11)* Everything that I was about to experience and go through was a form of discipline, a form of purging, a form of healing, and a form of purification. And so it began.

I was on my way to jail. I folded my hands in prayer, which were handcuffed, so it was easy to do, and they did not leave that position. As my mom said, it was a retreat of unceasing prayer, which was the beginning of my new way of living. A life of putting God first, with unceasing prayer.

## Chapter 4

### Lord, Show Me My Sins Through Your Eyes

As we arrived at the police station, they took me through two electronically locked and barred doors, and we entered into a very large room, the size of a gymnasium. As I entered that prison room, the noise that filled my ears was one I never before experienced. I don't mean for this statement to sound derogatory, but it reminded me of a dog pound. It just felt like a lot of barking sounds. In the center of the room was the place where all the police officers did their paper work on the prisoners. The FBI agents handed me over to the officers, and left. I was now in the hands of the police officers. They immediately told me to stand against the wall. As I stood there, I began observing the area, getting ready for whatever was next. The perimeter of that large room had about twenty smaller rooms with prisoners packed in each one. Each room had a small window facing inward. As I stood there, I saw many of the windows packed with faces to see the new prisoner that had entered (me).

There were loud noises and words coming from each room. Then an officer came to me and did a strip search, making sure I did not have anything hidden anywhere, and I do mean anywhere. He made a scene saying, "Crap, I was hoping I could go one day without having to look at a naked body." Oh, the symbolism. From what I understood, later on, they only strip search those who have committed a Federal crime. When the officer finished the strip search, and I put my clothes back on, he firmly said to me, "Seven!" I had no idea what he meant, so I politely questioned with the words, "Pardon me sir?" And even more firmly, he said, "Cell seven!" I quickly made myself realize that each of the smaller rooms were marked with a number, and I was to go to cell number seven. As I walked toward that cell, the faces in the windows withdrew. As I entered the fowl smelling room, I found one of the only open spots to sit. I sat there, hands still folded, and kept to myself, in silent prayer.

The room was about twelve feet by twelve feet, and in the center of the room was a metal toilet, which when flushed, sounded like a jet plane taking off. The entire room was simply a hard, cement floor. The floor was covered with a very thin layer of hard rubber, like that which is used in making bouncy rubber balls. The prisoners were able to use their fingernails, or plastic spoons provided at mealtime, to carve pictures, initials, or names into this floor. The entire floor was covered with all sorts of carved out words, and pictures. There wasn't an inch of space on the floor that did not have some form of inscribed graffiti. The room was excessively warm, and the fowl smelling urinary stench was equivalent to a dirty bathroom at a rest stop found on a hot desert highway. There were ten of us crammed in that small room. As I sat there, keeping to myself, making observations of the room and of the prisoners, one of them asked what I was in for. I said, "Possession of marijuana." And his immediate reply was, "Oh come on? Those were Feds that brought you in, and you were strip-searched. They don't do that for possession of marijuana." Whatcha really in for, boy?" So I said, "I've been charged with downloading pictures of girls under eighteen off the Internet." To get a laugh from the other inmates, he responded, "Well \_\_\_\_, who doesn't do that." Then there began conversation in the cell amongst the other guys about a Federal sting they heard about, in which they got a priest, a teacher, and some other people. I just wanted the discussion to

be dropped, so I just continued to keep to myself, as I said a prayer, over and over, for protection.

That room I was in was called a holding cell. You stay in that room until you are either released, which could be from a day up to a week, or until room in the regular jail cells were made available. I believe one of the guys in there, also charged with a Federal crime, had already been in there for a total of three days. From the conversation of the other inmates, holding cells are considered to be the worst of the worst.

Sitting there, remembering that my mother told me to think of it as a retreat, I tried to think about when Jesus was arrested. He was innocent. He had done nothing wrong. In fact, he did everything right. He showed us the way to heaven. He taught us how to live our life. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, forgave the sinful, and even raised the dead. He was totally innocent, yet he was thrown into prison. When the Roman soldiers came to arrest Him, he extended His arms to be bound and dragged away like an animal. He was taken to prison, thrown on that cold and hard prison floor. He was mocked by the Roman soldiers, who also beat Him, spat on Him, and treated Him harshly. Yet he simply sat there in prayer to the Father. So I thought to myself, "I too am in prison. Unlike Jesus, I haven't been treated harshly, spat upon, or even physically hurt. Surely, I too can turn to my Father in prayer."

I found myself starting to pray for each one of us criminals. I asked God to help me see His presence in each one of the prisoners. I asked him to forgive me for the sins I had done. I prayed for him to protect me, to be with me, to protect me, and to be with me (over and over). After a few hours had passed, an officer came to our holding cell, called my name, and said, "Pro-viz!" I had no idea what he meant, but with my previous response of asking a polite question to an officer, I decided to simply follow him. He handcuffed me and took me upstairs. As we were walking, I decided to give the polite questioning another try. I asked him, "Sir, could you tell me what 'pro-viz' is?" However, he harshly and quickly responded, "Pro-visit!" I still had no idea what that meant, but I saw that I wasn't going to get any kindness from him either, so I just remained quiet.

He led me to a quiet, cooler, clean smelling room, which had several smaller meeting rooms the size of a closet. Each smaller room had a table with two chairs. There was no one in any of those rooms. He took me to one of the smaller rooms, and I sat down in the chair at the table. Immediately, I saw, carved into the side of the table, the words, "Jesus Loves You." And what a tremendous peace came over me. I sat in that quiet room for about thirty minutes. I began thinking of all my sins that I had committed, and the deepness of my sins was slowly creeping into my mind. As I was pondering all that, the carved message, "Jesus Loves You" kept piercing my eyes. Then my attorney we decided to hire entered the room. He simply said to me, "I'm about to go meet with your parents to sign some contracts. I was over here dealing with another client and I figured you could use a break from the holding cell. So I just called you in for what they call a professional visit." He then continued to explain that I would most likely be out on bond the following day.

I was then taken back down to the holding cell, in which there were two more prisoners that were admitted into the cell while I was gone. The spot I had been sitting on was taken, and most all of the inmates were lying down on the floor, ready to sleep for the night. I had to find some place to lay before anyone else came into the cell. There was only one spot on the floor that was available, and it was located at the base of the toilet.

As I stepped over a couple inmates to get to it, I saw carved into the ground a fairly large cross. On the top of the cross was carved a crown of thorns, and inside the cross were the words, "*Jesus Team.*" I immediately laid down on that spot, almost diving towards it, with my chest pressed firmly against that cross the entire night. I praised God for that cross, knowing He was right there with me. I continued to pray to Him as I laid on that hard prison floor; praying for Him to be with me and to protect me, over and over.

At the top of my head was the base of the toilet. To the left of me were an inmate's feet, which kept kicking the side of my head through the night. To the right of me was the rear end of a large six and a half foot man, who happened to have a gas problem, farting on me the whole night. With my eyes half open, I could see pubic hair all over the floor where my head was (*since it was at the base of the toilet*). All of that was miserable, but I knew that below me was the cross, and within me was Jesus.

Through the next couple of hours, two more prisoners entered our cell, and they happened to be drunk. Being the one next to the toilet, I had the privilege of receiving some back-splash from one of the inmates, as he regurgitated into the toilet. I am thankful that he made most of it inside the toilet. There were fourteen of us, all squished and crammed together on that hard prison floor. There was no way I was able to sleep, but most all the other prisoners had no problem sleeping. There were about four of them that seemed to compete for the loudest snore, which came close in comparison to the jet sound of the toilet as it was flushed several times through the night. At one point, when it was again flushed, I readjusted my body on that cement floor, turned my head, only to see one of the inmates crouched in the corner with his hand down his pants, indulging himself. At that instant, I had the most disgusting feeling as a certain thought was forced into my mind. I think it was a thought that God wanted me to ponder. Through that thought that was forced in my mind, I imagined that prisoner taking exploitive pictures. A heavy feeling overcame my heart as I imagined what it would be like to be the one that was being exploited. Instantly, disgust, hatred, anger, followed by a deep heart, and great sorrow filled my soul.

Lying there, I realized that as I surfed the Internet, I was condoning such actions. I realized that I was no different from the people who watched and condoned Christ's carrying of the cross and crucifixion. I had realized that God was fulfilling the prayer that I asked Him on Wednesday, March 13th. "*Lord, help me to see my sins the way You see them*". And I began a deep prayer asking for forgiveness for the sin that I basically condoned. I thought about all the evil and sin done in the making and distributing of erotic pictures; as well as the exploitation done, putting them in a situation in which no one should be put. My inner soul began to bleed for the sorrow of condoning such an evil sin of the flesh. And Jesus' prayer on the cross came to mind, "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). Yet in my sins, I knew what I was doing; and I can see the damning difference! "*Father, Forgive Me! Forgive me for allowing that sin to enter into my soul, and for allowing it to grow with deep roots! Please Lord, cradle in your heart all those who are exploited! Cradle in your heart, Lord, all those who are physically abused! And Lord! Please Lord! Send someone or something into the lives of those that do and condone those sins! Make them see the sin they do! Forgive me Lord!*"

***Medjugorje message of December 4, 1986 "Dear children! Today I call you to prepare your hearts for these days when **the Lord*****

*particularly desires to purify you from all the sins of your past. You, dear children, are not able by yourselves, therefore I am here to help you. You pray, dear children! Only that way shall you be able to recognize all the evil that is in you and surrender it to the Lord so the Lord may completely purify your hearts. Therefore, dear children, pray without ceasing and prepare your hearts in penance and fasting. Thank you for having responded to my call.*”<sup>1</sup>

Still laying there, with my tear filled eyes pressed and hidden in my arms, I heard an officer going from holding cell to holding cell calling out, “Kazurka!?, Kazurka!? Kazurka!? That kept up for about five minutes, and you could tell that he was getting angry because he apparently couldn’t find the prisoner named Kazurka. It kind of sounded like my last name, but I didn’t want to make any kind of scene by speaking up. After awhile, he stopped yelling that name. A few minutes later he burst into our cell, knocks me on the head and said, “Hey! Kazurka!” At which I replied, “I’m Klazura.” Not humbled at all, he hollered out, “Whatever! Get Up and Come with me!”

I was not sure where I was going or what time it was. All I knew is that I didn’t want to give up the cross I was laying on. I quickly took off my coat and laid it there. Apparently, it was my turn for fingerprints and mug shot. There were no clocks around, but I caught a quick glimpse at the officer’s watch, and it was about 3:00 am. My tear-ridden face, which had been firmly pressed in my arms for several hours, was not ready for a mug shot. However, I could care less how I looked, only to realize that it was going to be that picture that would be plastered in the newspapers and on the news stations in the days to come. It was that picture that would be etched into the minds of all those that knew me.

Now, feeling more and more like a true criminal, I went back to the cell hoping my spot had not been taken, and it wasn’t. I laid there, chest pressed against the cross that was carved in the ground, and I continued in silent prayer. Farted upon by the guy to the right, continual accidental kicks from the guy to the left, four men competing in their snoring, and a jet engine of toilet flushes continued through the next three hours. Then breakfast time came. I wasn’t exactly hungry, but I didn’t want to stand out from the rest of the inmates. I grabbed a tray, which had two things that were recognizable, and two things that weren’t. I knew that I had a hard-boiled egg and a cup of wheat cereal on my tray, but the other two items looked like the bottom of an old leather shoe, and something slimy. I bit into the egg, only to reach a black center, at which I gagged in dry heaves, as I choked the bite down. I then gave the cereal a try. I took one flake, chewed on it, which tasted like cardboard, and I set it aside. Originally thinking that I didn’t want to stand out from the rest of the inmates, I sure wasn’t doing a good job. I couldn’t take a single bite of anything that was on my tray. However, upon later reflection, I don’t think I could have kept down a T-bone steak in such a smelly room. Not able to eat anything, I asked if anyone wanted any of my food. I placed the tray on the floor in front of me, and everything was taken off the tray within seconds.

After breakfast, we all just sat there waiting. Apparently, when the morning officers sign in, they are able to start releasing the people from the holding cells. It was quiet, and everyone wanted out of there. It made me start thinking of the souls in Purgatory. Those souls just sitting there, waiting for the door to open, and for their name to be called. I

never really prayed for the souls in Purgatory, but as I sat there thinking of my desire and hope for them to come and open the door for me, I thought of the desire the souls in Purgatory must have. There must be a sadness that they are in there, just waiting. However, there must also be a happy feeling, knowing that their destiny is fixed. Knowing that sooner or later, they will be called, and the door for them will be opened. So I began prayers for the souls in purgatory.

***Medjugorje message for November 6, 1986 "Dear children! Today I wish to call you to pray daily for souls in purgatory. For every soul prayer and grace is necessary to reach God and the love of God. By doing this, dear children, you obtain new intercessors who will help you in life to realize that all the earthly things are not important for you, that only Heaven is that for which it is necessary to strive. Therefore, dear children, pray without ceasing that you may be able to help yourselves and the others to whom your prayers will bring joy. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>2</sup>

Time was going by very slowly. Right around noon, one of the inmates said to me, "Your Fed friends are here." I got excited to see them, and sure enough, they came and got me. I was out of that holding cell, and I never wanted to return. I was then taken to the Federal courtroom, in another building. I was handcuffed at my hands and feet, taken to the Federal police car, and the gates to the garage opened. As I saw those doors open, I saw a beauty to the sunlight I had never experienced. Being locked up in that cell for just one day and night was misery. I could not imagine being locked up any longer. "*Thank you Lord, for Your own experience in prison. For when You were arrested and thrown into prison, you took upon yourself all the sins of ridicule, abuse, mockery, and injustice. Please bring Your peace into this world. With Your power, chain all those sins and cast them into the prisons of Hell.*"

As I was taken to the Federal building, I again was fingerprinted and my mug shot was taken. I was then escorted to the court, where my parents were already sitting with my attorney. It was so comforting to meet the compassionate eyes of my mom and dad. I felt terrible for the pain that I knew they were experiencing, seeing me handcuffed by the hands and feet, and presented before the court as the charges against me were read. Knowing the pain they must be going through, all because of my sins. I think I know a small portion of what our Lord must have felt when His eyes met the eyes of His mother as He carried the cross. The comfort He must have felt, yet the sorrow He must have also felt, for the sword that pierced His mother's heart. Yet He was innocent, without sin. "Thank you Lord, and thank you Mother Mary, for your unconditional love, for your compassionate heart, and for your comforting eyes. Thank you for giving me such wonderful parents that reflect a clear image of You and Your Mother. May I always focus on Your eyes, and may my eyes never look away from you again. I offer you all that I have seen. All the wonderful things I have seen through my eyes. The smiles of my friends and the students I have taught. The beauty and kindness I have seen. But I also offer up to you all the immoral and sinful things I have seen with my own eyes, out of my own will. Please take these sinful things I have infested my mind with, and uproot them out of my soul. Cast them down to the pits of hell, and replace in my soul Your pure soil

and the seeds of Your virtues, so that You can create a new heart in me. Please Lord, create in me a new heart.

I was then released on bond, with my jury date set for a few months down the road. My new life continued, sometimes minute by minute, sometimes hour by hour. But I now began to realize the one thing that was going to get me through those minutes and hours, which was unceasing prayer. *“Lord, Help me to pray more, and through prayer, may You help me to pray better. Please return my soul to purity and to the innocence that I once had as a child.”*

The days that followed were very difficult. My face, my story, and my secretive life was posted all over the media. In the newspapers and on all the news-stations was my secretive life for all to see. All of the communities where I lived and taught were made aware of my sins. Most every person I had ever known throughout my entire life was made known of my sinfulness. For many, I was now conveyed as an uncontrollable sex addict. I was portrayed as an animal. My sins were intensified because of who I was, which was taken away from me. Just as Jesus was stripped of His garments, I was stripped of my outer soul. Oh the fresh wounds! Oh the Pain! And now, I could feel a small portion of the pain Jesus felt when His garments were stripped, and his wounds were reopened. As I write this, I don't mean to put myself in a holy level by relating my pain to Jesus'. I was just enlightened, throughout this journey, many times, of Jesus' Passion, and the new meaning it had in my life.

After scourging Jesus all over His body, they placed a heavy, rugged, and rough cloak on His back. To even ponder that a little bit, think of a large wound in which a large piece of gauze was placed over it. Those deep wounds tend to create a sticky film of puss that attaches to anything that touches it. Now imagine ripping that gauze off, re-exposing that deep wound. Well, Jesus had those deep cuts all over His body. When the Roman soldiers placed the rough textured cloak on his back, those wounds began sticking and attaching themselves to that cloak. Then, with one quick pull, they ripped that cloak off of Jesus, reopening all those deep wounds He had all over His body. This is how I felt. My outer being, the part that was the awesome teacher, person, and friend, had been ripped away, leaving a bleeding interior sinful soul that was exposed, stinging, bleeding, for all to see. My pain was justice in action. Jesus' pain was for the salvation of my soul.

***Medjugorje message of March 29, 1984 "Dear children! In a special way this evening I am calling you to perseverance in trials. Consider how the Almighty is still suffering today on account of your sins. So when sufferings come, offer them up as a sacrifice to God. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>3</sup>

I felt totally severed of any good that was once part of me. My entire heart and soul was in pain. I felt the pain of my parents, having to see this horror that their child was part of, and now the consequences he had to endure. I felt the pain of the students, their families, the people I worked with, and all those I ever knew throughout my life. I felt God's pain. I felt the pain, knowing that I had lost their trust. I felt the pain, knowing what was in the minds of everyone I knew. It was no longer a feeling of, "What a great person Jeff was," or "What a great teacher Mr. Klazura was", or "What an awesome

friend Jeff was". Instead, it was an unbelief, a disgust, a confusion, a pain of the secretive life I had been living. I was demolished into nothingness, on a nosedive downward.

Just like an airplane, the first part of that nosedive was the loss of my engines. I had lost my identity, as I knew it. That loss of identity led to all sorts of questions, such as, who was I now? What was the plan for my life going to be? Where was I going? But through it all, God was rescuing me from the slavery of sin. When I first turned my back on God, through my sins of the flesh, there were feelings of pleasure and delight. However, as I hid from God, playing the game of hide-and-seek, He yelled out, "Ready or not, here I come!" I did not heed His warning, and after a while of hiding from God, it was time to pay the consequences. I could easily relate to the hide-and-seek that Adam and Eve played from God as well. Once those consequences started taking effect, that is when the disillusionment, the disappointment and the frustration set in. That was the part of the nosedive where the speed was picking up, the land was approaching at an incredible speed, and there seemed no hope. That is the part of the nosedive where people contemplate taking their own life. That is the part where you either jump out of the airplane, or you stick with it, riding it out, hoping to regain the engines. That final long stretch of the nosedive is what I call grief, which is a journey that would stay with me for years to come.

I never experienced that kind of grief before. To me, I guess it was just a word. But now I knew what it meant. Oh the sorrow, the anguish, the suffering and depression. Everybody has suffered in one way or another. Some have suffered more than others have. However, in suffering, we have all experienced some level of grief. That is when life suddenly changes. My routines and schedules that made up my everyday living suddenly vanish. Before grief set in, life seemed very orderly and planned. Then suddenly, all of that order changed. My life seemed changed forever. My routines became forgotten and seemed irrelevant. My priorities of life were suddenly changed. My priorities were no longer a concentration on my job, grading papers, planning lessons, or making fun things for the classroom. My priorities were no longer involved in accomplishing my daily duties. Suddenly, my number one priority was survival. Surviving the present moment was the foremost task. What was so important yesterday seemed so trivial today. That parent teacher conference that didn't go too well, that driver that cut me off on my way home, or that electric bill that seemed a little too expensive, all seemed so insignificant. What previously seemed so important became so meaningless.

Being a science teacher and having a father who is a meteorologist, I would say that this struggle in grief could be related to a tornado. It comes in and wipes away everything in its path, leaving nothing behind. It twists, shakes, and rearranges everything in your life. That tornado of grief played many games on my mind. There were many times when I went into the kitchen, went into my bedroom, or went into the family room to do something, yet when I entered the room I would regularly forget what I was going to do. It also played a big impact on my memory. There were certain things that seemed to be blocked from my memory, or at least you could say that there were certain memories that were shut out from my mind until I was able to gain the strength to accept and tolerate them. That sorrowing in grief caused my whole perspective on life to be changed. I also found myself to be brutally honest. There were times when whatever I was thinking came right out of my mouth, without any tact or thought. For me, the only people I was around were my parents. Thus, there were many times in which my feelings came pouring out of

my mouth, without any logic or finesse. Whether it was feelings of anger, sorrow, hurt, or frustration, those feelings often came rolling off of my tongue without control. Other times, the grief made me bottle up my feelings, becoming totally secluded and non-responsive. Ultimately, grief tossed me around like a destructive tornado.

I seemed to be in a state in which I didn't feel like I was alive, but I knew I wasn't dead, even though there were many times I desired to be dead. I felt as though someone pushed the pause button on my life. Everybody else seemed very alive, going at a fast forward pace. It caused me to wonder where I was, why I was so alone, and where I was heading. I was living in the present. I didn't think about yesterday because it had come and gone. I also didn't think about tomorrow, because I could simply care less about tomorrow. I was trapped between yesterday and tomorrow. This trap also consisted of being between what was and what will be. I so wanted to go back to what was. However, I couldn't. I didn't want to go forward because there seemed to be no reason to go forward. In this life of grief, there seemed to be no positive outcomes. However, grief has the possibility of making a new person out of you, if it doesn't kill you first.

Grief will either make you or break you. It will suck you into the tornado and spit you out. When it spits you out, grief will either make you land face down, wallowing in misery, or it will make you land on your back, causing you to look up again. This is what grief is intended to do. It is designed to make you land flat on your back, causing you to look up to God, refocusing on God, realizing He is all you have and He is all that you need. And that was what I needed. I needed to refocus my eyes and life on God, realizing I was totally dependent upon Him for survival. And through this total realization of dependency, one becomes and lives humbly. Opposite of this realization of the need for God is a feeling of self-dependency, which usually arises when everything is going your way. This, in turn, causes pride to grow, which is exactly what had happened to me.

Before all this happened, everything I was passionate about was going my way. And that one word, "passion", described me well. If I was passionate about something, I would immerse myself in it. Thus, I had indulged myself in excessive extremes of passion. There was the passion of lust, of which everyone was made aware. However, even more so than that was my passion in my career. I became so involved in my life as a teacher that I lost control of the rest of my life, including my spiritual life. That focus on my career led to an increase in my pride, as I began taking all the credit for the wonderful things I did as a teacher. So much so, that I began expecting that acknowledgment and reinforcement.

I had allowed pride to gain roots and grow, as I became my own god. I felt that I was one of the best teachers around. I felt that I was respected and liked by all. I felt that each student looked up to me. I sought that recognition, causing my pride to grow. Not even realizing it, I should have been seeking that recognition from God, for He tells us, "*How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek praise that comes from the only God? (John 5:44)* Pride is the root of so many sins. When pride takes over someone's life, God will destroy that sin through humiliation, for "*Man's pride causes his humiliation*" (*Proverbs 29:23*). And pride was in control of so many of my actions, which was now destroyed through humiliation. It was at that point that I realized that God had again answered my prayer, "LORD, HELP ME TO SEE MY SINS THE WAY YOU SEE THEM." Already being made aware of my sins of the flesh, and

now that I was being shown my sins of pride, I wasn't too excited to be made aware of my other sins.

I thought my sinful life affected no one except for myself. The sins I did were in the privacy of my own home. No one knew about them. But oh, how I was wrong. Just as my sins now affected every single person I ever knew, and every child that I had ever taught, they too affected all the souls in heaven. For God tells us, *"A man who gives in to sins of the flesh and says to himself, 'Who can see me? Darkness surrounds me; why should I fear to sin?' Of the Most High he is not mindful, fearing only the eyes of men. He does not understand that the eyes of the Lord, ten thousand times brighter than the sun, observe every step a man takes and peer into hidden corners. Such a man will be punished in the streets of the city. When he least expects it, he will be apprehended."* (Sirach 23:16,18-19,21)

What I thought was secretive, and no one saw, was actually seen right in front of God and for all those in heaven to see. I could now see my sins the way God saw them. *My God, forgive me for living a hypocritical life. For teaching Your Word, but living against it. Forgive me for thinking I was a good shepherd, when actually I was a hypocritical shepherd. Please do not destroy me the way You did to the Israelite leaders who gave into the temptations of the Medionite women (ironically pronounced Media Night, which is the temptation I gave into; the **media** of the Internet during my **night** life). Please Lord, forgive me, and thank You Lord for rescuing me from the bonds of my addictions. Please give me strength. Heal my bleeding soul that has been ripped open for all to see. And please Lord, bring peace, understanding, compassion, and strength to all the students I taught, to all their families, to all the faculty I worked with, and to the entire community.*

And so the thing I want you, the reader, to ponder is this: If your sins were made aware to everyone you knew, as well as to millions of people you didn't even know, how proud would you be? Some of our sins are made aware to people around us, for we openly display our sinful life, with or without even knowing it. The way we gossip about others, the way we judge others, the way we show anger or hatred toward others. However, some of our sins are secretive; and so I again ask you how proud you would be if those secretive sins were made aware to all people? Well, whether you like it or not, they are made aware. God sees every sin you do. And at the end of our life on earth, God tells us that our sins will be made aware to all. The problem with the typical life today, and I am part of that typical life, is that we have a mentality that all is O.K. We think that the sins we do won't cause much harm, because God has saved us from our sins. So we basically get a free ride to heaven because Jesus died for our sins. Yet we forget that there are consequences to our sins. Just as there are consequences when a child says "no" to their parents or to the teacher, or when an adult says "no" to their boss or to the police, there are consequences to our saying "no" to God. But we tend to overlook that there will be consequences to our saying "no" to God the Father, which is called sin. My sin just happened to be against human law as well, so I got the opportunity to see some of the consequences due to my sins.

The media kept on my story for several days. Since I was still considered to be employed by the Church and since everything broke loose during the time of the scandals and persecutions that were happening in the *Church (with sexual abuse amongst some priests)*, my sinful story and picture made the news several days in a row. The school was

ready to terminate me, and a trial with the Diocesan School Board was set, in which I would be given the opportunity to give reasons why I should stay employed, doing other tasks besides teaching. Because of all that was happening in the Church, it became quickly evident that they wanted to separate themselves from me.

The toughest part of that feeling of separation was the fact that it was during that time in which I was hoping for compassion. Throughout my life's experience with the Church, they had been there during different tribulations. When there was death in the family or with a close friend, they were there to comfort. When I had to undergo making big decisions, they were there to give guidance. However, now, when I needed their help during this most troublesome time in my life, many in the Church separated themselves from me. I received letters telling me that there was a specific place in hell for me. I had parishioners obviously change their path to totally avoid me. I guess I was just hoping for some comfort. Instead, however, I was avoided and my name was whitewashed (*erased*) from everything in the school and parish. Anything that had my name was immediately erased, including the erasing of me as a parishioner. And this is where the hurt came from.

The reason for the immediate separation was because I broke the contract in which I agreed to abide by the teachings of the Church. Because of my sinful actions, I was not abiding to the teachings. Thus, came the separation. However, it made me think of the many other people employed by the Church who were also living lives that were not in compliance with Church teachings. In all actuality, every person goes against the teachings of the Church when they sin. And we are all sinners. But in my contemplation I began to wonder about those employed by the Church who use contraception, which also goes against the teachings of the Church. I also thought about those that I knew who had premarital sex, those who had addictions to excessive drinking and regular routines of gambling. I began to think about those living in divorce and remarrying, or those living with another partner outside of marriage. Obviously, I was very angry, but part of that anger was because I was afraid. And oh, how that anger loves to feed on itself to prevent healing.

Many people leave the Church with bad experiences like that. However, we are not to base our faith upon the people that make up the Church, for every member of the Church is a sinner. Our faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. That is why I stayed with the Church. I may have felt so alone and by myself inside the church, but that isolation helped me to focus on God, and His true presence.

Realizing the separation that was happening, I sensed that my only two choices were to either get terminated, or to give my resignation. I gave my resignation, which is what the people wanted. As soon as I gave my resignation, that caused the media and the press to come to a complete halt on my day by day story. As long as I was employed with the Church, the media had a heyday with my story. But as soon as I was separated from the Church, there was no longer any interest, any gossip, any judgment, and thus, no story. I found it to be very interesting that the media had talked about all the Catholic jobs I held, but never mentioned my teaching in the Public School. Satan truly is present in the media, for it was through the media (the Internet) that I had allowed Satan to enter my soul. And it was the media that actually went to some of my students' homes to interview how they felt about their teacher being thrown into jail. Here I was, charged with

condoning the exploitation of minors, but then you have the local news actually taking effort in harming the minds and souls of the children I taught by going to their homes, when they were already hurting and confused, as they asked them inappropriate questions. They had no second thoughts about going to my former students' homes to interview them, as the cameras zoomed in on their tear stricken faces. Oh how I wished the local news would have been arrested. So I figured that when I no longer had any connection with the Church, then they would stop all the harassment. And when I gave my resignation, it truly hit me, that through my sins, I had lost my heavenly paradise.

## Chapter 5

### Loss of Heaven Due to Sin

Describing heaven is a difficult task. I would imagine that it is a place that is beautiful to the eyes, to the mind, to the heart, and to the soul. Yet its beauty is one that is impossible to understand. One of Jesus' only descriptions of heaven was when He was on the cross. The thief, who was on the cross next to Jesus, asked Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. Jesus responded by saying, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The paradise of heaven is one my feeble mind is not able to comprehend. As Christians, we believe that we need to be made worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. And to be made worthy, we need to know God's word and His laws. Not only do we need to know it, we need to keep it in our hearts as we live it. We know that through our sins, we can lose the possibility of spending eternity in heaven, which is a long time

Because my sins were also against the human law, I was able to physically experience the consequences of my actions, leading to an experience that would be symbolic of what it would feel like to lose heaven. If convicted, I would have to register as a sex-offender, anywhere I lived. I would not be able to do work which involved being around children for the rest of my life. I would never teach again. So in my mind, it really wasn't a five-year sentence. Instead, it was a life sentence. But thanks to the work and love of God, who broke the bonds of sin I was in, it didn't become an eternal sentence.

Teaching was my joy. It was the one thing that seemed to complete me. Teaching was my heavenly paradise on earth. I loved every moment of my career. Being around the people with whom I worked was like walking the rolling fields of grass with the saints. I would always look forward to arriving at school as early as possible to get set for the day. Oh how I enjoyed my morning coffee with my fellow teachers, chatting, joking, smiling, and laughing. Then, when the bell rang and the students came in with their smiling faces, it was like the beauty of the morning sun on the rise. Immediately, I would be greeted with heavenly gifts of smiles, good-mornings, and excited faces for a day of school. I always looked forward to making every moment of the day enjoyable for the students. I looked forward to every interaction throughout the day. All those questions the students asked. All the stories they were so excited to share with me. All the laughs we shared throughout the day. All of those little helping hands that they so eagerly wanted to display. All their joys, all their sorrows, and all their hopes they shared with me. And this is exactly what Jesus means when he says that we need to become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

*Medjugorje message of February 25, 1999 "Dear children! Also today I am with you in a special way contemplating and living the passion of Jesus in my heart. **Little children, open your hearts and give me everything that is in them: joys, sorrows and each, even the smallest, pain, that I may offer them to Jesus; so that with His immeasurable love, He may burn and transform your sorrows into the joy of His resurrection.** That is why, I now call you in a special way, little children, for your hearts to open to prayer, so that*

*through prayer you may become friends of Jesus. Thank you for having responded to my call."*

I had lost my heavenly paradise, here on earth. I immediately went from experiencing heaven, straight to an experience of hell. I was arrested, thrown in a holding cell, lost my daily contact with everyone I knew and loved, and I lost the ability to do my joy of life. Furthermore, most of my tangible items of memories, material achievements, and priceless possessions were taken from me.

Throughout my six years of teaching, I had placed many of my activities, presentations, and other treasured pieces of work on my computer. When they confiscated my computer, they took a big chunk of my life from me. I imagined it to be similar to someone losing a lot of irreplaceable items due to a house fire. They took every lesson plan I ever created, every worksheet, activity, and lab that I ever produced. They took every youth group presentation, which included page after page of guitar songs, fun games, and religious talks. They took every drama script I ever composed, including a hundred page script on Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, which I had perfected over years. They took all computer files to a board game that I created during the first two years of my teaching career, which was one of my prized possessions. But even more prized than the board game was a computerized behavior management simulation that I had been creating ever since my years in college. As many of the students attested to, this was one of their main highlights of the school year. I had finally perfected the programs involved, and was currently in the process of copyrighting it to possibly put on the teaching market. Thus, when they took my computer, they took much of my life as a teacher. Furthermore, they also confiscated many pictures of my memories as a teacher. Even more damaging than taking all those material possessions was the confiscation of my dreams, wishes and goals. Everything I wished for as a teacher was no longer in my mind, or in sight. Those wishes would never come true because I was no longer able to teach. I felt completely empty. They simply took from me so much that I cared about. This was an extreme and abrupt change for me, but true heaven and hell are even more extreme opposites than my experience.

I could not even imagine living in a life of hell for eternity. However, thanks to Jesus, for His passion on the cross, and for His rescuing me from my sins, I knew I had another chance at living an eternal life in heaven. If I stayed focused on Jesus, and the type of life He wanted me to live, I knew that one day I would be walking the rolling fields of paradise in heaven. I would be singing those heavenly songs again. But this time, it would be for eternity. However, since we live in a society of "now", I wanted to be back to my heavenly paradise now. I didn't want to have to live out the rest of my life without that heavenly paradise that I had experienced.

***Medjugorje message for March 25, 2001 "Dear children! Also today I call you to open yourselves to prayer. Little children, you live in a time in which God gives great graces but you do not know how to make good use of them. **You are concerned about everything else, but the least for the soul and spiritual life.** Awaken from the tired sleep of your soul and say yes to God with all your strength. Decide for conversion and holiness. I am with you, little***

*children, and I call you to perfection of your soul and of everything you do. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>2</sup>

Being made aware of the seriousness of some of my sins, I knew the number one priority in God's eyes was my salvation, even if it meant a temporary loss of my heavenly paradise on earth. Even though I came to realize that, I still yearned for a return to that paradise. I missed my students. I missed my friends and my fellow teachers. I missed my heavenly paradise on earth. *Please Lord! Please, let me be able to go back to my heavenly paradise! Please give me another chance! Please, Please, Please!* I found myself saying this type of prayer quite often, begging the Father for another chance. However, that type of prayer was soon to be revealed to me, by God, and through the Blessed Mother, of being an incorrect way of praying.

## Chapter 6

### Consequences to Sin

I taught my students several lessons on how to live a good life. Many of the lessons I taught them were very powerful and educating. However, the last lesson I would ever teach and demonstrate to my students was the most powerful of all. I had always talked to my students about making good choices. But now, through my demonstration of bad choices, my final lesson showed them that some choices could affect the rest of their life. I would regularly teach them to build a strong foundation of good habits, for God tells us that if we build our life on a strong foundation, then the floods of trials would not shake us. However, if we build our life on unsteady ground, we would be washed away when the floodwaters come crashing around us. God said, “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord,’ but do not do what I command? The one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on sand. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed.*” (Luke 7:46, 49)

All choices we make in life have consequences. Good choices lead to good consequences, but poor choices lead to bad consequences. In life, there are certain consequences that can be cleared up with an apology, acts of kindness, or even through simple punishments. There are other choices that could lead to life altering consequences. As my students saw, an admired teacher, whom they thought was perfect, made the wrong choice, which led to a consequence that affected several lives.

Satan will tempt and attack all people. Satan blasted me left and right with temptations. I knew that the power to cast out those evil temptations and those evil spirits was to stay in prayer, and to flee. I knew this, but did not come to understand it until the damage was done. God saw this and had retrieved me back to His side. This is when Satan picked up his efforts again, and he was working really hard on me. He was testing me, and was trying his best to kill the new seeds of virtues that God had planted in my new heart.

Satan would test my faith. He would test my hope. He would test my obedience, patience, and perseverance. He would test my purity, humility, love, and my new life of prayer. It was during those times of testing that I just didn’t want to pray. However, prayer was all that I could do. I didn’t have friends. I was isolated in my parent’s home. I was without a job. Normally, my day would click the hours by so quickly, and the days turned into weeks and months, and everything was at a fast pace. Now, I was experiencing total slow motion. All I had was the clicking of seconds, but I was very graced to be motivated to spend those seconds in prayer. When those testing times came, I would start in prayer, and felt it was worthless because I would just ramble off words. However, after a little time in prayer, all those evil feelings would begin to exit.

***Medjugorje message for January 14, 1985 "My dear children!  
Satan is so strong and with all his might wants to disturb my plans  
which I have begun with you. You pray, just pray and don't stop  
for a minute! I will pray to my Son for the realization of all the  
plans I have begun. Be patient and constant in your prayers. And  
don't let Satan discourage you. He is working hard in the world. Be  
on your guard!"***

Prayer is the answer to all things, especially when the last thing you feel like doing is praying. It is a simple analogy. Our souls are like a glass full of water, filled to the rim. As you know, when you add something to a glass full of water, then some of the water will overflow and leave the cup. Our souls are the same way. When something enters our soul, this causes stuff to exit. During tough times, when one feels depressed, lonely, or hopeless, bad thoughts start entering the soul. Those thoughts start filling the soul, which causes the good and holy thoughts to start exiting. Thus, it is so important that during those tough times, those times of testing, those times of surrounding evil, not to let it ponder on our minds. If we do this, we will be allowing that evil to be entering, and the holy to be exiting. Instead, we need to start praying immediately. It always seems to be difficult to start in prayer during those tough times, but when we do, then we start filling the soul with good and holy thoughts. *“Dismiss all anxiety from your minds. Present your needs to God in every form of prayer and in petitions full of gratitude.” (Philippians 4:6)* Then, the evil that would try to enter, would disappear. However, it would come back and try again, and again, and again. And when it did, the simple answer was to pray again, and again, and again.

*Medjugorje message for June 25, 1996 "Dear children! Today I thank you for all the sacrifices you have offered me these days. Little children, I invite you to open yourselves to me and to decide for conversion. **Your hearts, little children, are still not completely open to me and therefore, I invite you again to open to prayer so that in prayer the Holy Spirit will help you, that your hearts become of flesh and not of stone.** Little children, thank you for having responded to my call and for having decided to walk with me toward holiness."*<sup>2</sup>

Because of my sins, I had lost the trust of many. So many people put their trust in me as I cared for their children on a daily basis. All my students had built a strong trust in me as I showed care towards them each day. And now, because my secretive sins were made aware to all, I had lost that trust of all I had known. Through my sins being made public, it affected the hearts and souls of hundreds, which caused a domino effect. It seemed impossible to me that all these people I knew could truly see the teacher within me who put so much effort and love into making school fun. Because of the trust I broke, it seemed logical that the only thing they saw was a teacher who was a sexual predator. In order to regain that trust, I would have to prove myself to them through my daily actions. But since I had been demolished into nothingness, set aside in the corner, whimpering in humbleness, I was not able to prove myself. I was not allowed to. This was very difficult for me, because God tells us to reconcile with those we have hurt. I didn't mean to bring any hurt, any pain, any anguish, or any discomfort to anyone. I was very sorry. The inability to reconcile was so painful to my soul, because I cared for each one of them. The only thing I could do was to pray for all of them. Oh how I wanted to reconcile those hearts that were affected by my lifestyle. I wanted to regain their trust. So again, in sorrow, I would pray that God would bring them peace and understanding, returning them to happiness and trust in others.

That broken trust then made me think of God's trust in me. I too had broken His trust. I finally did see it possible to work on regaining trust. He was seeing me every day, and all the deeds I was doing. He knew my heart and soul. And I wanted to regain that trust. Those days that were very difficult were days of testing to see if He could put His trust back into me. I would be tested through temptations, through hopelessness, through lack of faith, through patience, through perseverance, through charity, through obedience, and through humility. As I looked back on each day, I was able to recognize when I passed those tests, knowing that I was starting to rebuild God's trust in me. However, I also looked back at times when I knew I did a poor job, wondering to myself whether I had passed those tests. I came to realize that when those difficult times came, they were tests to rebuild His trust in me. I also came to realize that the only way to pass those tests was to immediately turn to Him in prayer. Again, during those tough times of testing, the mind tended not to be open to sincerity in prayer. It seemed to be just rambling words. Nevertheless, as I persevered in prayer, that would end up breaking the lack of desire to pray, and I would feel God coming back into my heart, which was the answer to passing those tests. It was easy during those times to want to simply fall asleep in sorrow and grief, but God tells us, "*You should be awake, and praying not to be put to the test.*" (*Matthew 26:41*)

***Medjugorje message of August 22, 1985 "Dear children! Today I wish to tell you that God wants to send you trials which you can overcome by prayer. God is testing you through daily chores. Now pray to peacefully withstand every trial. From everything through which God tests you come out more open to God and approach Him with love. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>13</sup>

During my path of regaining trust, I wanted to learn more about biblical people who had sinned, and how they grew closer to God. When I had received several consoling cards and letters from friends and relatives, I noticed that several of those cards referred to the Bible story of King David, and the sins that he committed. I thought this was very interesting because my baptismal name (*middle name*) is David. I truly feel there is a lot to a person's name. For example, my first name, "Jeff", means "God's peace". Anyone that knows me realizes that the word "peace" is a good description of me. I have never enjoyed conflict. I have always tried to bring peace to people's lives. I often received the comment from several people, such as, "I'm not sure what it is, but you just bring me a sense of great peace." Feeling that there is a lot to a person's name, I wanted to learn more about my baptismal name. Thus, I started to learn more about King David's life.

For the most part, I already knew his story. I knew he was a great king. I knew the people looked up to him, obeyed his requests and commands, and God was well pleased with him. However, that pride that was being built in David had started to overtake his vision, just as my pride took over my vision. One day, he saw a woman, named Bathsheba, whom he desired. However, she was married to Uriah, who was a faithful soldier to King David. Well, King David plotted a way to get what he wanted. He had Uriah put on the front lines in battle, causing His death. King David then took in Bathsheba as his lover and wife. I knew all of this, and I knew God was not happy with King David's actions. However, what I did not know were the consequences that came to

David for sinning against God, and falling into that temptation. As I read about David's life and story, I learned more about God's consequences. God had blessed and given David everything. But doing evil, in the sight of the Lord, God brought consequences to David. God told David, "*Because of what you have done, the sword shall never depart from your house. You have done this evil deed in secret, but I will bring it about in the presence of all Israel, in broad daylight.*" (2 Samuel 12:12)

Wow! My life and experiences were very similar to David's. Just as King David was a great leader, I, Jeffrey David, was a great teacher. Just as King David had faithful followers, I, Jeffrey David, also had a strong following of students who put all their faith into what I taught. Just as all the people listened to King David when he spoke, I, Jeffrey David, was also a great speaker, with ears always willing and eager to hear my thoughts and words. However, just as King David fell into temptation of the flesh, I, Jeffrey David, fell into my own sins of the flesh. Just as King David did those sins in secret, I, Jeffrey David, also did my sins in secret. Furthermore, through my sins, I too had consequences, which were very similar to King David's. Just as King David's sins were exposed for all of Israel to see, my sins were also exposed for all the places I had ever lived.

After reading about David's sins and consequences, I continued to read about his life that followed. However, it was getting difficult to understand. It started talking about battles and listing names and places that I couldn't even come close to pronouncing correctly. My mind was getting all jumbled, and I stopped having a desire to read any more. I got to the chapter titled, "*David's Song of Thanksgiving*". When I looked at the length of that song, which was several pages long, I decided to read it later. However, a week went by and I never did read it. Then, the following week at Mass, the priest gave a sermon about reading the Bible. He mentioned about how us Christians are very willing to read the New Testament, but we feel the Old Testament is hard to understand, with all those difficult words and names. The priest said that we tend to say to ourselves, "I don't get much out of the Old Testament". The priest then continued to say, "That is a terrible way to start your prayer. And when you read the Bible, you are praying. So instead of saying, I don't understand it and don't get much out of it, take effort to pick up your Bible and read it until it becomes understandable." Immediately, I thought of my reading of King David in the Old Testament. I made an agreement with myself to continue reading David's story. However, the day continued, and I was too busy, looking for employment.

*Medjugorje message of August 25, 1996 "Dear children! Listen, because I wish to speak to you and to invite you to have more faith and trust in God, who loves you immeasurably. Little children, you do not know how to live in the grace of God, that is why I call you all anew, to carry the word of God in your heart and in thoughts. Little children, place the Sacred Scripture in a visible place in your family, and read and live it. Teach your children, because if you are not an example to them, children depart into godlessness. Reflect and pray and then God will be born in your heart and your heart will be joyous. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>4</sup>

It was a long and rough day, as anyone who has ever job searched knows. I had applied to several jobs, but I couldn't even get the slightest response. Here was a thirty year old man, well equipped with six years of college, and six years of professional work, who couldn't even get a job at a fast food restaurant. It felt like everyone in the large city I lived knew about my story and didn't want anything to do with me. They would see my resume, see the title, "5th Grade Teacher who resigned early", and they would put two and two together, which led to no interest in hiring me. As I was driving home from a long day of job hunting, those frustrating thoughts started filling my mind. To get my mind off of it, I turned on the car radio.

The station I started listening to was simply a guy who would read through the Bible. It wasn't any lesson, sermon, or talk on a specific topic. It was simply a man who would read through a chapter in the Bible. I wasn't too excited to listen to this, but I remembered what the priest said in his sermon about reading the Bible. Therefore, I left the radio on. As this man began reading, I was thrown back for a spiritual ride home. He started reading exactly where I left off in my Bible, "*David's Song of Thanksgiving*". As the narrator read through that chapter, it came alive. It was all about how God reached out and rescued David from the evil ways. It then continued to talk about how many people attacked him, but how God rescued him from those attacks. It talked about how the people in his own land turned against him, but God made Him great in other lands. "*You rescued me from the strife of my people and my homeland, and you made me head over nations. A certain people I had not known became my followers. As soon as they heard me, they obeyed.*" (2 Samuel 22) As I drove home listening to this, I got an incredible heavenly feeling that something great was going to come about through all of this tribulation, especially if I stayed focused on God through prayer, fasting, and sacrifice.

Once this short radio show of Bible reading came to a close, a cheesy sounding religious song was played. Normally, there would have been no way that I would have listened to it, as it was so cheesy sounding, but being in this spiritual high, knowing God was going to do great things with all that was occurring, I decided to listen. It was a group of three ladies singing in unison, "Don't you know you've been born again? Out of evil and into Him." The whole song seemed to be just a simple repetition of that phrase. This just added to my feeling that God was with me. Then the next song that came on was all about this person who was living a life of sin. God rescued him, and took the gifts this person had to bring the life of God to others. Again, it was very cheesy sounding, and normally I would have turned it off, but I felt God was speaking to me, telling me, "I have a plan for you, but you need to say 'YES' to this plan and to My will for you. Stay always in My presence." Right when I pulled up in the driveway, the song finished, and it went to commercial. It was truly a spiritual ride home. I just knew that God had a great plan and will for me. I just didn't know what it was.

## Chapter 7

### Create in Me a Clean Heart

The first part of God's will for me was to clean up all the damage I allowed to collect in my soul. Sin is so damaging. It damages and affects other people. But even more so, it damages our relationship with God. However, because of my faith in what I believed, I knew that Jesus Christ had died for my sins, for all our sins. *Glory be to the Son, Jesus Christ, who by His precious blood delivered me from evil, and reopened for me the gates of heaven!*<sup>1</sup> God had pulled me out of that deadly life I was living so that I could turn back to Him, with an open heart. Through His grace, the gates of my heavenly paradise would be opened again, for my eternal life.

Because I had allowed so many deep wounding sins to be planted in my soul, there was a lot of healing and cleaning that needed to take place. This was somewhat symbolic of the cleaning that I needed to do where I lived. I immediately moved out of my apartment, and moved in with my parents. *Lord, I thank you for my parents and for my family. I am so fortunate to have such loving parents who are always there, by my side, ready to help me, their child, return out of darkness, and into the light.* That process of moving out of my apartment was very symbolic of my soul. There was so much cleaning to do. Again, I had my mother there, helping me clean and move out, just as my parents had always been there for me throughout my life, and especially throughout my darkness, ready to help me clean up my life and move onward.

As I went through and packed up all my belongings, I threw away anything that I owned that had to do with living a sinful life. I even threw away the monitor to the computer I used when surfing the Internet. Some may say that the monitor to a computer isn't evil or sinful. However, I truly believe that evil spirits will reside in things that are used for evil purposes. Since I had viewed so many immoral things through that monitor, I thought that there could be an evil spirit residing in it. I didn't want to keep it, nor did I even want to pass it along to another person. If we believe that holy and good spirits occupy things and places that are used for holy purposes, then we too must acknowledge that evil spirits will reside in things that are used for evil purposes. I also remember listening to different priests give talks about Satanism, witchcraft, and occults, which dealt with this idea. Plus, the Bible has several stories about people and things being possessed, in which Jesus "*drove out many demons.*" (*Mark 1:34*) Furthermore, "*many of those who had become believers came forward and openly acknowledged their former practices (of evil magic). Moreover, a large number of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them in public.*" (*Acts 19:18-19*) Therefore, I was ready to go through all my belongings and throw away anything I owned that dealt with a sinful life. I did not want to own anything that was even the slightest impure.

Just like all my possessions that I threw away, I needed God to clean up my soul. I needed Him to pull up all the immoral weeds that grew in my soul, and I needed Him to throw them away. I needed Him to take out the bad soil and replace that emptiness with His holy soil. I needed Him to plant new seeds of virtues. Just as my cleaning and moving out of my apartment was a full time job, so was the cleaning of my soul that I needed God to do, which He continues to do each and every day.

*Medjugorje message of March 25, 1997 "Dear children! Today, in a special way, I invite you to take the cross in the hands and to meditate on the wounds of Jesus. **Ask of Jesus to heal your wounds, which you, dear children, during your life sustained because of your sins or the sins of your parents.** Only in this way, dear children, you will understand that the world is in need of healing of faith in God the Creator. By Jesus' passion and death on the cross, you will understand that only through prayer you, too, can become true apostles of faith; when, in simplicity and prayer, you live faith which is a gift. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>12</sup>

I knew I wasn't allowed to see any of my students or co-workers, so I felt very lonely. I began having different thoughts enter into my mind. I began wondering whether the cause of my arrest was due to the workings of Satan not wanting me in the classroom spreading the knowledge and love of God, or was it the workings of God? I began to think of what the students, parents, and co-workers thought of me. Did they not want to be around me? Did they think I was an animal? Could they still remember the part of me that was good, or was only this bad sin of mine stuck in their minds? I felt so alone. Oh how I wanted all that knew me to remember the good in me. But out of fear, I was afraid that all that was etched in their minds was this bad sin that I had lived. I began to think that it was Satan that caused this to happen. I had been touching the hearts and minds of so many students every day. I was teaching them all about Jesus, and Satan wanted me out of the classroom. After pondering all those thoughts on a regular basis, I came to the realization that it was Satan that caused it. However, His work was done the day I entered into the snare of looking at erotic pictures. That is when I allowed Satan to enter in my life. But actually, it was God who saved me from that immoral life.

Over and over again, I would wonder what type of effects it would have on the students, and all those I cared about. I wanted to be reconciled with them, but I was not allowed to. I felt like my whole being was pinned down, not able to do anything. Just as it was a cause of evil that pinned me down, so too was it evil that nailed Jesus to a cross. Therefore, every time I thought those things that I so desired, but was unable to do, I began praying for peace for all the students, their families, the faculties, and the communities.

*Medjugorje message for December 25, 1994 "Dear children! Today I rejoice with you and **I am praying with you for peace: peace in your hearts, peace in your families, peace in your desires, peace in the whole world.** May the King of Peace bless you today and give your peace. I bless you and **I carry each one of you in my heart.** Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>13</sup>

I would go through all my class lists, praying for each student and their family. I would go through the faculty lists, praying for each co-worker. I couldn't sit there and ponder all day long what they thought of me, or of my great desire to see them again. This would only deepen the agony in my heart. So instead, I would do the only thing that I could do, which was the most powerful thing to do, which was to pray for them. When

those agonizing feelings overtook my thoughts, I began receiving compassionate cards and letters of prayer from several people. I received cards filled with compassionate words from many friends, from people I didn't even know, and from people of whom I least expected.

God tells us to reach out to those in need, those who are suffering, those who are afflicted, and to those who have been rejected. However, all too often, we tend to ignore "those" people in our church. We quickly and easily show favoritism to other people who seem to be perfect, or seem to have it all together. I know, because I was like that. Again, God was showing me my sins through His eyes.

The compassionate letters I received helped bring me comfort, but I still wallowed in a desert of loneliness. Every day, I was used to seeing and coming into contact with hundreds of people and friends. Now my daily interactions consisted of my loving mother and father, as well as my daily prayers with the Blessed Mother and Eternal Father. Without really knowing it, I entered into a new form of school. God's School of Prayer, in which He helped rebuild and expand onto my spiritual life, creating in me a new heart.

I had already gone to confession the day after the FBI came with the search warrant, but felt I needed to do it again. I felt this need because there were many reserves when I went the first time. The biggest reserve was that I wanted to be back in the classroom. Now that it was made aware to me that I would not return to the classroom, I felt a deeper need for a really good confession. It was Divine Mercy Saturday, and I had spent several hours in prayer, examining my conscience. That night, at confession, I truly felt God's presence in the confessional. It was a long confession, explaining sins from my childhood all the way to the present. I knew I did not have to repeat sins that I confessed in previous years, but wanting to start all over, on a new relationship with God, I wanted to have a truly thorough confession. I knew my confession was thorough when I received my penance. Usually, my penance consisted of five minutes in prayer, not an hour, with additional things to do. I had felt a new level of relief lifted off of my soul. You see, God calls us to the confessional, waiting with open arms. When we are in sin, and we all are, we need to rush to Him with open hearts, open minds, and open souls. We need to truly see His presence there, waiting for us to come to Him, so that He may give us His heavenly embrace.

*Medjugorje message of November 25, 1998 "Dear children! Today I call you to prepare yourselves for the coming of Jesus. In a special way, prepare your hearts. **May holy Confession be the first act of conversion for you and then, dear children, decide for holiness.** May your conversion and decision for holiness begin today and not tomorrow. Little children, I call you all to the way of salvation and I desire to show you the way to Heaven. That is why, little children, be mine and decide with me for holiness. Little children, accept prayer with seriousness and pray, pray, pray. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>4</sup>*

Serious sins are not the only sins for which we need to go to confession. Minor sins could lead to serious problems as well. In relation to the physical body, let me give this explanation. When I was younger I would get scrapes and bruises on a regular basis, just

like any young boy. There was one time in which I got a bad rug burn. It hurt really bad, but it wasn't anything that was life threatening. My mom told me to take a shower and wash it with soap. When I got in the shower, it stung so much that I avoided getting any water or soap on it. I did a very poor job in treating the wound. As a couple days went by, it got infected and started causing other problems. My stomach had a bad ache to it, and I began to limp, favoring the side that had the rug burn. When we went to the doctor, we found out that it was infected, and was causing an internal infection as well. I had to go on a certain medicine for a long time, because now it was serious. In the same sense, a minor sin, which simply causes a rug burn to the soul, is nothing that is deadly. However, if it is not treated correctly, it could turn into something deadly. This treatment, again, is confession through a priest. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he treats and heals those minor wounds. Plus, he gives us direction on how to further treat the wound so that it will totally be healed.

Just as we need a doctor to help keep our physical bodies healthy, so too do we need a spiritual doctor, the power of God through the priest, to help keep our spiritual bodies healthy. Therefore, let us realize the true power in this wonderful sacrament. It is one that should not be feared, but should be one we practice regularly. Look to God. Seek Him. See Him in the confessional. Let your spirit rest in Him. And surrender yourself to Him.

*Medjugorje message of January 25, 1995 "Dear children! I invite you to open the door of your heart to Jesus as the flower opens itself to the sun. Jesus desires to fill your hearts with peace and joy. **You cannot, little children, realize peace if you are not at peace with Jesus. Therefore, I invite you to confession so Jesus may be your truth and peace. So, little children, pray to have the strength to realize what I am telling you. I am with you and I love you. Thank you for having responded to my call.**"<sup>5</sup>*

Through my new life of prayer, I began going to daily Mass, regular confession, and praying the daily rosary. In the early stages of this new prayer life, God had given me a little gift, giving me a thank you for turning towards Him during those trials, instead of turning further away from Him. The gift He gave me was a golden rosary. Back in 1987, my eldest sister and brother went to Medjugorje, Bosnia (former Yugoslavia). Upon their return, my sister gave me a few gifts that had been blessed by our Blessed Mother during one of the apparitions. One of the gifts she gave me was a simple three dollar rosary. For some people, those blessed articles miraculously turn to gold. This was the same rosary that I had hanging on display in my apartment, collecting dust. This was the same rosary that I grabbed the night of the FBI seizure. I had not prayed with this rosary in a long time. It is a beautiful blue rosary, with a silvery metal chain that held all the beads together. As the days of praying the rosary went by, the silver chain that held all the beads together had turned to gold. Furthermore, as my tribulation progressed, and as I continued in prayer, the gold intensified. I can still remember watching it slowly turn. Day after day, my parents and I observed the gold slowly spread throughout the chain. It started around the third and fourth mysteries and slowly worked its way around the entire chain. *"I thank you Lord for this special gift. Especially in this time when I am very lonely, when I so desire to be with all my students and all my friends and co-workers. I*

*thank you for this gift, for letting me know that you are with me, and for letting me know that prayer has the power to change things. I love you and thank you for your love for me."*

I took this wonderful and miraculous gift to mean a couple things. For me, it was a sign telling me that God was with me each step of the way. It was also a symbolic sign telling me that prayer changes things. But even more so than that, it was symbolic of what was happening to me. Just like gold that is put in the fire to be refined, I felt as though my soul was being refined, burning off all the impurities. For God tells us, "*In fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation.*" (Sirach 2:5) I just felt like God was telling me, "Oh, Jeff... I want to purify you. I want to make you clean... Oh, Jeff, I need to put you through the crucible, to make you pure again."

I do not base my faith on miracles, such as the rosary turning gold. However, to be honest with you, I found a new desire in myself for fervent prayer. I admit that a lot of my initial prayers involved asking for a miracle, hoping that all charges would be dropped. But in those prayers, I was also praying for my heart, mind and soul to be cleansed. Through those unceasing prayers, I gained an even greater desire to pray during any free time that I had, which was all that I had. I asked my mom for some good books to help me, spiritually, during that tough time. One of the books she gave me was a Novena Prayer book titled, "The Triumph of My Immaculate Heart". It was a daily prayer book, in which you would meditate on a different message each day. You would then say several prayers. The messages of meditation for each of the thirty-three days in that prayer book were different messages given by our Blessed Mother in private apparitions to a priest.

I already had a deep interest in our Blessed Mother's apparitions, especially those happening in Medjugorje. And the messages given in that Novena prayer book were helping me on my spiritual journey. However, through the power of prayer, I did not exactly know what was in store for me. Through that prayer book, and through my interest in the Blessed Mother's apparitions, I began learning a lot more about her messages. This form of prayer helped transform my heart into a new heart, ready to be consecrated with Mary and Jesus' hearts.

***Medjugorje message for October 25, 1988 "Dear children! My invitation that you live the messages which I am giving you is a daily one, specially, little children, because I want to draw you closer to the Heart of Jesus. Therefore, little children, I am inviting you today to the prayer of consecration to Jesus, my dear Son, so that each of you may be His. And then I am inviting you to the consecration of my Immaculate Heart. I want you to consecrate yourselves as parents, as families and as parishioners so that all belong to God through my heart. Therefore, little children, pray that you comprehend the greatness of this message which I am giving you. I do not want anything for myself, rather all for the salvation of your soul. Satan is strong and therefore, you, little children, by constant prayer, press tightly against my motherly heart. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>16</sup>

The Novena I was praying, focused on consecrating our hearts to the Immaculate Heart, in which she would offer our consecrated hearts to her Son, Jesus. This was very interesting to me because the compassionate words from the first cards I received from a few of my fellow co-workers stated, “During these trying times, focus and give your heart to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” Now I began to understand what they meant.

When I first started this thirty-three day prayer booklet, I had no idea what was in store for me. I just wanted a simple guide to help me in prayer. When I opened that prayer book, I found out that I was supposed to do those prayers and meditations the first thing in the morning. However, my mom gave it to me right before I went to bed, and I wanted to get started right away. That first night of praying the prayers was when I began to realize the power of God. It is hard to fathom the power, knowledge, and wisdom of the Holy Eternal Father, but I began receiving a small taste of it. On ‘day one’ of this prayer booklet, it gave the following Message from our Lady.

*Dear children, the act of consecration to my Immaculate Heart is just as I speak it. It is an act and not merely words. I rejoice that your hearts are realizing this. **I tell you, your hearts are a window to your soul; the Act of Consecration opens this window. Your soul is like a prism. It is designed by God to reflect Him. If there are impurities in this prism, it cannot reflect the glory that was intended. To bring clarity to the soul, you must pray. Only through prayer may all impurities be dissolved.** Look into my heart, dear ones, for when you gaze in, you shall only receive the Trinity. I can only reflect the presence of God to you. Listen my children, I assure you, open your hearts to receive the light of God. Allow only Him to be reflected to you. (July 7, 1992)<sup>7</sup>*

I meditated on that message which hit me profoundly. That message was so similar to a prayer that I came up with on my own. It was a prayer that I prayed every day during my drive to work. I would always pray that the window to my soul would be clean so that God’s peace, love, joy, compassion and wisdom would shine through my window onto all those I came in contact with throughout the day. However, when I looked at her message, which stated, “If there are impurities in this prism, it cannot reflect the glory that was intended,” I realized that my prism needed cleaning. As I sat there in my bed, meditating on that message. I released a sincere prayer asking God to clean the window to my soul so that His graces could shine through it with great radiance. I knew I had been forgiven through the sacrament of reconciliation, but now was the task of cleaning up my heart and soul. The first thing that needed to be done in that cleaning process was to squeeze out all the evil that I had allowed to reside in my heart. After meditating on that message, I was ready to wrap up my prayer session with the required prayers that the booklet told me to pray. On the front page of the prayer book gave the following message from the Blessed Mother:

*Pray from the heart each and every prayer. I tell you to always remember that the Father is listening each time. I know, dear children, that your hearts would not wish to send a hurried prayer or show a lack of sincerity in your words to Him. (June 13, 1992)<sup>8</sup>*

Since our Lady told us that the Father does not want a hurried prayer or a lack of sincerity, I took time to contemplate on each of the required prayers. Part of the required prayers involved saying an Our Father, a Glory Be, and a Prayer to the Holy Spirit, for each virtue that Mary would like to plant and grow in our hearts. For a true consecration of hearts, she wanted us to pray for the virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, Humility, Patience, Perseverance and Obedience. To be honest, I was kind of overwhelmed with the

two hours of prayer I had just done, but felt a great goodness about it all. As I laid down to go to sleep, I kept meditating on asking God to squeeze out the evil that I had allowed to reside in my heart. As I meditated on this, I fell into a deep sleep.

A few hours of deep sleep passed by when I was suddenly awakened by a loud noise. It was a noise that startled me from my deep sleep, causing me to quickly turn on the light by my bed. With eyes wide open, I looked around for what made that noise. It sounded like a large picture frame that came crashing to the ground. I searched the fairly empty room, but could not find a single thing that would cause a wide-eyed awakening from a deep sleep. This bedroom, in my parents' house, was a guest bedroom. It consisted of a bed and a dresser. There was nothing that could have made such a loud noise. I crawled back into bed, shut off the light, and closed my eyes. A few minutes passed when I felt a deep pressure on my heart, almost as if it were literally being squeezed. When I opened my eyes in the darkness of the room, I saw a large and dark figure standing right by my bed. This scared me so tremendously that I immediately jumped out of bed and turned on the light. I stood in the middle of the room, and looked around for about fifteen minutes. I was so frightened that I checked all the rooms. I did not want to turn off the lights. Here was a thirty-year-old acting like a little child, scared of the boogie-man. I slowly got back in bed, but did not turn off the lights. After about fifteen minutes of just laying wide-eyed in bed, I felt like the evil spirits were coming to get me. I was worried that my parents would find me dead in my bed when they awoke. With all the trials of life that were going on, I didn't want them to think I had committed suicide, so I actually wrote them a note that stated the following: *"Mom and Dad, 1:00 am... I was just awakened by a sound in the room, I opened my eyes in the dark room and saw a large tall dark figure in the darkness of the room. Felt a strong presence of a spirit of some sort... Said some prayers and asked the angels to protect me, and asked that the Precious Body and Blood of Christ to wash me and to cast away any evil spirits... I have a strong feeling of someone coming to take me away. Rosary is a bright, bright gold. So if you find me dead, I just want you to know that I did not commit suicide. Love Jeff."*

When I finished writing that note, I crawled back into bed, with the lights on. I put the novena prayer book, and my rosary, under my chest, as I laid there, face down, with eyes wide open. After another fifteen minutes, I decided that whatever was going to happen was going to happen. Finally, I shut my eyes, felt around for the light-switch, and shut off the light. I sat there with my eyes completely shut, and I put the covers over my head. After about five minutes of out loud prayers, I just wanted to open my eyes to see if I was simply going crazy. When I did so, I saw that same tall silhouette of a figure standing right at my bedside, at which it then walked to the foot of my bed. Frantically, I shut my eyes, and said out loud, over and over, "May the Body and Blood of Christ wash me and cast away all evil spirits." I could feel something squeezing my heart. I just continued my chant of prayer, and before I knew it, I amazingly fell asleep.

When I woke up in the morning, I immediately told my mom about my experience. I showed her the note and everything. She laughed, and said, "Wait until you hear what the Gospel reading at Mass was this morning". The Gospel reading was about when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time after His death. *"Jesus stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' But they were startled and terrified with fear, and thought that they were seeing a ghost."* (John 24:36-37) Wow! They were terrified with

fear. That is an exact description of my experience. However, the thing that was in my mind, was my sincere prayer, which I prayed right before going to bed, “Lord, please squeeze out all the evil that I had allowed to reside in my heart.”

Now then, you the reader probably think that I am some crazy psycho. Well, as the following night came, I began wondering that myself. I didn't know if what I saw and experienced was for real, or if I was just going loony. The same thoughts the apostles had about seeing Jesus after His resurrection began filling my mind. Did I really see what I thought I saw? I entered my dark bedroom and feeling sort of foolish, I asked the spirit that visited me to display its presence once again. I simply sat in that dark room, wondering and thinking about my previous night's experience. In case I did see that silhouette, I had my hand on the light switch ready to turn it on in an instant. I was simply questioning, or testing, what I had experienced. I wanted to know if it was for real. After realizing that God would probably not be pleased with my testing Him, and after sitting there in the dark for fifteen minutes with my hand on the light switch, I decided to give up my wishful thinking of a revisit from whatever visited me the night before. However, right when I turned the light switch on, with a bright flash, the light bulbs burned out. ALL THREE light bulbs, at the same time! My heart skipped a beat with a quick overflow of fear, but excitement. What are the chances of all three light bulbs burning out right at that moment. I was in utter amazement. It was like a sign telling me, “You better believe what you saw!”

After replacing the light bulbs, I immediately pulled out my prayer booklet, and started on day two of my Novena. Again, I found myself in two hours of prayer, meditating on Our Lady's message for the day. I began realizing that a new heart was being created in me. Sitting in prayer, looking at a picture of myself as an infant, I poured out my thoughts in prayer. “***A clean heart create for me, Oh God. (Psalms 51:12) Dig up the evil weeds that I have allowed to grow in my heart. Cast those weeds and the impure soil to the pits of hell. Fill all those empty spaces in my heart with Your pure soil. Plant in this new heart your seeds of virtues. Please shine your amazing light of love on these seeds to allow them to grow in my heart. Purify this heart of mine that I had made so impure. Return it to the innocence of the child I once was.***” And I knew that because I had allowed my habitual sins to take over my heart, it was going to take a continued effort to clean it up.

As I prayed the Consecration prayer (*one of the required daily prayers in this booklet*), I began gaining a better understanding of what the consecration to the Immaculate Heart meant. Mary wants all of us to give our whole being to her so that she can take it to her Son. This has been her constant role throughout the Gospels. She was the one chosen by God, who wishes to direct all of us to her Son. Her example of always saying a fervent “Yes” to God is what she wants to instill in us. Just as the early apostles, who began the Church, were united in one heart and mind, so too our goal is to unite the entire world into one heart of peace. “*May they be so perfected in unity so that they may be one as we are one.*” (*John 17:23*) The grace that will direct this unity is assisted by the one who is “*Full of Grace*”, (*Luke 1:28*) also known as the Mother of Unity.

“*My Queen, my Mother, I give myself entirely to you, and to show my devotion to you, I consecrate to you this day, my eyes. May you take all that I have ever seen. Take all the bad things that I have ever seen or allowed my eyes to see, and offer it to the Father for the suffering He received during His passion. Take all the good and beautiful*

*things that I have also seen, and offer them to the Father as my gift to Him. I consecrate my ears, and all the unholy things that I have allowed to enter into my ears, and I ask you to offer it to the Father for the suffering He received during His passion. Take all the good and loving things that I have ever heard with my ears and offer them to the Father as my gift to Him. I consecrate my mouth, and all the bad and immoral gossip, ridicule, and judgment that has ever come out of my lips, and I offer it to the Father for the suffering He received during His passion. Take all the good that has ever come out of my mouth, words that have helped people come to know your Son's love, and offer it to the Father as a gift to Him. And I consecrate my heart and soul, and all the evil that I have allowed to enter and grow, and I ask you to offer that to the Father for the suffering He receive during His passion. Mother of God, during this consecration, I ask for your eyes, your ears, your mouth, your heart, and your entire being, so that I may see and know your Son in the way that you see and know Him. Wherefore good mother, as I am thine own, keep me and guard me as your property and possession. Guide me closer to Your Son. Amen."*

Through these prayers and meditations of our Lady's messages, I could feel the seeds of virtues that were planted within me beginning to sprout in my new heart. As I went day by day, through this Novena, I felt a new heart being created in me. A heart that I never desired to get dirty. A heart I was ready and excited to tend to each day, cleaning out any weeds that were starting to grow again. I gained a greater interest in all of Mary's messages, and all that was happening in Medjugorje, so I began educating myself all about it. And through this education of reading inspirational spiritual stories, facts about the apparitions, and messages our Blessed Mother has given us, I formed an even greater desire to pray. Because my life seemed to be on pause, I had a lot of time to spend in prayer. Our Lady had asked the visionaries, and the world, to pray and meditate on all three mysteries of the rosary each day, to regularly practice the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist, to fast, and to fill our lives with prayer, prayer, prayer.

***Medjugorje message of July 25, 2000** "Dear children! Do not forget that you are here on earth on the way to eternity and that your home is in Heaven. That is why, little children, be open to God's love and leave egoism and sin. May your joy be only in discovering God in daily prayer. That is why, **make good use of this time and pray, pray, pray**; and God is near to you in prayer and through prayer. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>9</sup>*

I started taking on these habits of prayer. I guess that is also part of my personality. I seem to always put 200% into anything I do. Before this, I was putting all my effort into my job and into my habitual sins, which began to form into false gods. When I was putting 200% into my job, I felt that I was also giving God that 200% because I involved Him in my job. However, after continual praises of my teaching ability from parents and co-workers, my pride grew, causing the effort that was put in towards my job to be for a different reason. I started doing this great effort for the sake of myself, and not for the sake of God. Realizing what I had done, I redirected all my efforts throughout the day towards the One True God. This redirection of my life helped return my heart to purity. It

helped me carry my daily cross, and to accept God's will for me, whatever it was, without reserve.

## Chapter 8 Do Not Fear, For I Am With You

As we live our lives, we get used to our daily activities. The people we see each day. The tasks we accomplish. The comforts we enjoy. The happy and joyful moments which regularly fill our lives. All of those routine activities almost become expected, making it easy to take for granted. However, when all of those routines and expectations of our daily life are taken away, causing a complete and immediate change, great sorrow and sadness fills the heart. Sadly, but typically, it is then that one is really made aware of the gifts that were given to them. When my career in teaching was taken away, I realized all that God had given me, which I took for granted. My daily tasks and joys in the classroom were ripped away from me. My income, thus, my place where I lived was removed from my life. My happy and peaceful interactions with my students and friends were severed. I had a hard time accepting this to be real. Somehow, I wanted it all back. However, to move on with God's plan, I had to let go.

I had to let go of anything that was anchoring me down. I had to let go, so that God could take me where He wanted me. I had to let go! And as I let go, great sorrow and loneliness filled my heart. I could see the world around me moving at its regular fast pace. I, on the other hand, was at a standstill. Oh, how I desired my routines that I once had. I felt so alone. I did continue to pray. I continued the journey in my Novena prayer book. I decided to do this daily Novena right when I woke up, and repeat it again right before I went to bed. As I did this, Mary's messages became more understandable. God had an easier time speaking to me. In the morning I would meditate on what I needed to focus on throughout the day. As night came, and I again reflected, I could see how the daily message was fulfilled in my heart and soul.

*Medjugorje message of August 25, 1995 "Dear children! Today I invite you to prayer. Let prayer be life for you. A family cannot say that it is in peace if it does not pray. **Therefore, let your morning begin with Morning Prayer, and the evening end with thanksgiving.** Little children, I am with you, and I love you and I bless you and I wish for every one of you to be in my embrace. You cannot be in my embrace if you are not ready to pray every day. Thank you for having responded to my call."*

Through all these extreme struggles happening to me, and since it was such an abrupt change of life, I had a hard time waking up in the morning. There were days when I would pray, but the words would not come out. At times I felt frustration and anger toward the extremities of what was happening to me. I was not a pedophile. I was not a sex offender. I loved teaching, and I cared for each child that I taught. I began to form many angry questions in my mind. "Why couldn't the prosecutors, FBI agents, and investigators see all the good that I did? Why didn't they look at all the effort I put into making school fun and enjoyable for all the students? Why were they going after me with such a strong force, making sure that I would never teach again?" Many of those questions began to fill my mind. I began to feel hatred and anger forming in me, which is

exactly what Satan wanted. He wanted me to feel angry, for then I would allow passageway for evil to reenter my newly cleaned heart. However, as I started getting those feelings, I would turn back to prayer. I wasn't exactly excited in my prayer. However, because I took the initiative to turn towards God through prayer, He was able to cast out those evil thoughts. Then, after a few moments in that unexcited prayer, He would speak to me, and made me reflect on the daily message in the prayer book: *I assure you, you do not know how difficult it is for you, dear children, to escape the snares of evil that Satan prepares for you. His seductions have become so alluring and subtle that only through the joining of our hearts, shall you be saved from them. (October 17, 1992)*<sup>2</sup>

As I continued on this daily journey of prayer, God continued to give me little gifts. I felt He was giving me those gifts to tell me that He was pleased with how I had responded to the struggle that was in my life. I think He was pleased with my desire to return my soul to purity. I think He was pleased with my effort to keep my soul clean through the daily sacrament of the Eucharist, through daily sacrifices, and through prayer. However, I think He also began to give me those gifts because I was lonely. I think God just wanted to tell me, "I'm here, and I love you. I thank you for having repented your heart, handed it over to me to be cleansed, and for turning toward me, instead of turning away from me in this time of tribulation. I know it is very difficult for you, but please do not worry. Always remember that 'My grace is sufficient for you'. (2 Corinthians 12:9) I AM WITH YOU."

The first little sign, or gift, God gave me on my path toward Him was my rosary which turned gold. Vicka, one of the visionaries in Medjugorje, said that during one of her apparitions in January 1982, the Blessed Mother told her that gold rosaries are meant to be a sign that prayer changes human hearts, human circumstances, and human endeavors. Wow, what a wonderful gift, and a wonderful message that explained the gift. Just as my rosary changed, so too could my prayer be powerful enough to change things. Just imagine the amount of change that could take place in this world if we all pray, with open hearts, minds, and souls. Through prayer, we can bring a unity of peace in every heart, globally.

*Medjugorje message for January 25, 1991 "Dear children! Today, like never before, I invite you to prayer. Let your prayer be a prayer for peace. Satan is strong and desires to destroy not only human life, but also nature and the planet on which you live. Therefore, dear children, pray that through prayer you can protect yourselves with God's blessing of peace. God has sent me among you so that I may help you. **If you so wish, grasp for the rosary. Even the rosary alone can work miracles in the world and in your lives.** I bless you and I remain with you for as long as it is God's will. Thank you for not betraying my presence here and I thank you because your response is serving the good and the peace."*<sup>3</sup>

I also took the changing of my rosary to gold to be symbolic of what was happening to my soul. Just as gold is refined and purified in fire, so too was my soul being refined and purified. I was being put in God's refining fire, which was not too comfortable.

However, throughout this refinement process, He took care of me. He constantly let me know that He was in control and with me by gracing me with little gifts. I received one of those gifts on my first day of writing this book. I began typing in the evening, and continued onward until 3:00 am. I had remembered the message I was meditating on for the day. It was all about being like a cloud that is free in the sky, allowing the Holy Spirit to blow you where He wants you: *Look, dear children, to the heavens above you. See, when the winds shall blow, each cloud shall move in unison. Each cloud is carried by the wind alone. It is sent where God wills, on the breeze of heaven. The Holy Spirit shall come upon you now in this same way. He shall blow across your soul and it shall be carried by Him. It shall move in unison with my heart in this way. (March 23, 1993)*<sup>4</sup>

I had prayed throughout the day, truly meditating on being like a cloud. I prayed that I could be like a cloud that had no anchor, so that I could be blown to where I needed to be. That evening is when I decided to start writing this book. I typed and typed and typed, as the words flowed out of me at a rate that was astounding myself. I knew I was a fast typist, but I even ceased to amaze myself that night. It was 3:00 am when I decided I needed to get some sleep.

Before climbing into bed, I went outside to sip on a hot drink and I prayed to God. *"I have no idea where you want me to be, or what you want me to do? This is new ground for me, which is uncharted, and I have no sense of direction of where You want me to go. I am not sure if this book that I am writing is for Your will, or for mine. But I ask you to write Your words through me as I accomplish this task."* Then, as I looked up in the starry, moonlit sky, I saw a single huge cloud overhead. Immediately, I saw that it was in the shape of a mighty angel, almost like an archangel, that was blowing some kind of musical instrument, as if playing music for all to hear. I know it is easy to see different images and shapes in the clouds. I especially know this because I consider myself to be very artistic. However, I can't quite explain the detail and majestic beauty of this angelic cloud that was illuminated from the moonlight. It wasn't just an image. It was a beauty, a peace, and a joy. And when I saw the "trumpet" the angel was playing, I just felt as if it was God telling me that He is pleased with me. He is pleased with the writing of the book for many people to hear, just as all of heaven was hearing that angel play his trumpet. Remembering that my daily meditation and message from the Blessed Mother was all about being like a cloud, I had an indescribable peace in my entire being. This incredible inner happiness began causing me to give continuous praise to God within my soul.

The cloud then swiftly disappeared over my head and into the horizon, as quickly as it came, leaving a cloudless starry night sky. I thanked God for the wonderful gift. Then, as I sat there, sipping on my hot drink, I saw a star in my peripheral vision make a sudden movement, but not like a shooting star. Immediately, my eyes focused on that star, but I saw that it hadn't moved. I didn't think much of it as I was still in a wonderful happiness over the angelic cloud. I was sitting there praying in joy, when I saw another star, and yet another star, in my peripheral vision, move around. I immediately looked at those stars, but again they hadn't moved. I began staring at specific stars to see if they would move, but they wouldn't. However, I would see the other stars, in my peripheral vision, doing a little swirly dance. The stars that appeared to be doing this swirly dance were in the same location where that majestic and angelic cloud had passed by. I started to think that my eyes were going buggy due to working on the computer for so many hours. I decided to put the distant city lights in my peripheral vision to see if they would swirl around. I

could not get the city lights to do the swirly dance, but again the stars above were all dancing around.

My soul just began to laugh as I watched those stars do a sideways V-8 dance in the night sky (which after later reflection, is the shape of the infinity symbol; eternity, forever, no beginning and no end, alpha and omega, the first and the last). However, there was something in me that kept thinking it was just an illusion. Then, as I was thinking that thought, out of the night sky, right where the cloud had passed by, a tremendously bright, very slow moving shooting star streaked across the sky. It wasn't a quick short streak. It was a long, bright blue, slow moving streak of light, whose line, produced by the streak, glittered as it disappeared. I just began laughing and started praising God and His Mighty Wonders out loud, there in the yard, at 3:00 am. I kept looking in the sky to see the stars dancing. However, after that shooting star streaked across the sky, the swirly dance of the stars came to a halt. That is when I knew it was not my eyes playing tricks on me, but it was God giving me a mighty gift. *"I thank you God and I praise Your mighty name and Your mighty Power. You are so wonderful that you even make the stars dance in glory. You are beautiful, and I LOVE YOU! Thank you for being with me, right next to me, for being my friend and my companion on this tough journey in my life. May I never cease to praise your mighty name, and your unspeakable power!"*

When I woke up the following morning, I was so eager to share my experience with my parents. I was actually excited for the day. This was unusual, because usually I woke up in sadness and sorrow, thinking about my previous routines, the school where I worked, and thoughts about all the students and faculty. This particular morning, I still thought about all those people, but this time it was out of joy. I prayed for all of them, as usual, and particularly asked God to bring them the happiness that He is capable of bringing to everyone's hearts. I immediately pulled out my Novena prayer book, started on the new day's message, and headed out for daily Mass with my mom. I just felt like I was truly starting to understand this "Consecration of the Heart". In this consecration, uniting myself with Mary and Christ, I began to realize that my tears could be found in their eyes, my hurts and sorrows were bringing pain to their hearts, and my agony was submerged in their minds as well. Everything that was part of me was being united to them. Through this consecration, I was gaining a great desire of prayer. But this prayer life didn't just consist of the warm and fuzzy prayers. A lot of those prayers involved pouring out my sorrows, angers, fears and anxieties to God. Continual prayer is about the only thing that I wanted to do. And the messages the Blessed Mother had been giving the visionaries at Medjugorje was making more sense to me, "Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray!"

I was on an incredible high from the gift God displayed to me. I started my day in wonderful prayer, receiving the Eucharist. However, that great feeling was about to be smoldered by a deep and heavy feeling of sorrow, pain and sadness. My mom and I decided to go to the library to educate ourselves on the law and the criminal charges brought against me. We researched newspapers about other people who had similar charges brought against them for receiving child pornography through the Internet. In the upstairs library, my mom was searching through the newspaper articles. I was downstairs, searching old newspaper articles found on the microfilms.

We searched for articles about people who had a similar charge brought against them as I had. However, we did not find many articles about people who were charged with looking at child pornography on the Internet. I searched the microfilms for four hours

straight. But one thing I did find, over and over and over again, was article after article after article, talking about the accusations of child molestation from priests within the Catholic Church. After reading all of those articles, a great sorrow filled my heart and soul. Oh the sadness, the pain, the sorrow. I had a small feeling of the sadness Jesus must have felt in the garden of Gethsemane.

***Medjugorje message for June 25, 1985 "I invite you to call on everyone to pray the Rosary. With the rosary you shall overcome all the adversities which Satan is trying to inflict on the Catholic Church. All you priests, pray the Rosary! Dedicate your time to the Rosary!"<sup>5</sup>***

Oh the great sorrow and anxiety that must have overcome our Lord. That night, in the garden, our Lord, Jesus Christ, saw every sin of mankind. Every sin man ever committed, and every sin man will ever commit. He saw it all that night. However, our Lord didn't just see these sins, He felt them. He allowed the river of sin to flood over Him until "his sweat became like drops of blood". (Luke 22:44) And here, I knew that through my sinfulness, I had added to that pain He felt that night. I couldn't totally relate to that extreme pain, anguish and sorrow, but after reading all those articles of child molestation and accusations within the church, a heavy weight pressed on my heart. In a very small way, I could relate to the anguish He must have experienced. I cannot explain it too well, but it was like a heavy metal ball, the size of a golf ball, was sitting in my chest, on top of my heart. I tried taking deep gulps to swallow and get rid of that feeling, but I couldn't get that heavy lump out of my chest. One thing I knew was that I couldn't read another article. Neither could my mother. She had the same feeling. We were in such sadness as we drove home. I loafed around the house, amazed that my mom could fix dinner after such a day of sorrow. I was doubly upset because I started my day on such a happy spiritual high, and now I was at a depressive low, with this heavy lump on my chest of which I couldn't rid. I decided to try to do some prayer.

Without much desire, I began praying the sorrowful mystery, praying for God's mercy for all the different types of sins throughout the world. This prayer started to pull that deep weight off my chest, but not completely. I began to work on the book I was writing. I felt that this was something God wanted me to accomplish, especially after the wonderful gift He gave me the previous night of the cloud and stars. As I started writing, the words began to flow. Again, it was around 3:00 am when I just had to get some sleep. I felt the thoughts pouring out of my soul, and onto the book, but my fingers needed a break. They had been typing nonstop for five hours. The cramps in my fingers made me think about the early scribes who copied book after book of the Bible. It also reminded me of all the work I did as a teacher.

With my hot drink, and with my intrigue in the starry night sky, I again went outside for a little break before climbing into bed. I admit that I was looking for a little gift from God. I kept looking in the sky, but I did not get any angelic cloud, or any dancing stars, or even a shooting star. But that was O.K. I didn't need a gift to know that God was with me. As I came inside, I just had a feeling, and an urge to go right up to this large painting of Jesus' face that my parents had hanging in the house. This was the same painting they have always owned, ever since I was a child. I stood there, face to face with this painting,

in a dimly lit room, whispering out loud to Jesus. I offered Him my sorrows of the day. I then offered my joys. Still contemplating on all that I read earlier in the day, it was harder for me to find the joys. I also offered Him my struggles, my wishes, and my hopes. As I stood there talking to Him face to face, I started to notice a flickering light shining on the painting.

There appeared as though a bright candle that had a gentle breeze blowing across the flame was lighting the room. I looked to the lamp in the room, which was behind my back, and I studied it carefully, but it was not flickering. I then turned around, focused again on Jesus' face, and continued my prayer. Again I saw a flickering light. I again studied the lamp, but there was no flickering. It seemed to be only happening on the painting of Jesus' face. Very similar to the night before, I got an incredible feeling of peace, happiness, and joy. I began praising His name and His goodness out loud. However, this time I did it in a whisper because I didn't want to wake my parents. I stood there for several minutes, staring upon the face of Jesus, and watching the flickering of light. I praised Him, said goodnight to Him, and I crawled into bed.

Before shutting off the light, I pulled out my Novena prayer book to reflect on the message. With all that I had done throughout the day, I forgot what the daily message was. When I reread it, God's gift of the flickering light, as well as my deep sorrowful experience of reading about all the prosecutions of the Church made sense. The guided meditation stated the following: *"Be ready, just as the ten virgins that waited for the arrival of the bridegroom, with their lanterns filled with oil, and the wicks trimmed. Let us stand strong in this final battle for peace in the world, when the blows of persecution shall strike at our heels. Remain unwavering in your example, and hold your light of truth high, to light the path for those who search in darkness."*<sup>6</sup>

This message was in relation to the parable about the ten virgins that were waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. They all brought lamps, which seemed to be their tickets to enter into the wedding feast. Five of them were wise in that they brought extra oil for their lamps. The other five were foolish in that they did not bring extra oil. Because the bridegroom was long delayed, the five foolish virgins ran out of oil. Upon hearing that the bridegroom was on his way, they ran to the merchants to purchase some more oil. However, while they were gone, *"the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked"*. (Matthew 25:10) When the others returned and asked the Lord to open the door, He said to them in reply, *"I do not know you."* Therefore, we are to stay awake, for we know neither the day nor the hour (Matthew 25:12-13) that our Lord will come for us.

From this parable, I realized that God could come for us at any moment. We need to be ready. Our judgment day before God will come. If I had known the day and hour of the FBI coming to serve me a search warrant, I would have been prepared. I would have made sure never to have entered that trap, or if I did, which I did, I would have made sure to have changed my way of living, getting rid of all that bad stuff before the day the FBI came. However, I didn't know the day or the hour, and thus, I was not prepared. I should have been prepared by listening to God speaking to me, telling me to get rid of my sinful way of living. So too is how we should be prepared for God, for what if it was my life that was taken that night, in some sort of accident, such as a car accident? That would have been the bridegroom's (God's) arrival for me, and I would have been short on oil for my lamp. I would have knocked on the locked door, asking God to let me in, but I am

afraid that I would have received an answer from the bride-groom saying, “I do not know you.”

Reflecting on my immediate experience of the flickering light, I felt as though Jesus was personally speaking those thoughts to me, face to face. I just had to give praise and thanks for His holiness, for speaking to me in ways that I least expected it. *“What a wonderful gift, and wonderful signs You are giving me Lord. I thank you so much, and I love You. I just wish that I could truly see you face to face, with heavenly eyes. I wish you could take me away from all these tribulations, and just keep me next to Your side. I especially pray for all the persecutions that are striking the heels of the Church. Please guide the Church to keep it strong. Always be with the Pope. These times of trials are difficult. I am lonely, and I miss all my friends who I am not allowed to see. Please give me faith to know You are with me always. You are my flame that flickers light on my path of this valley of darkness.”*

With that prayer, I shut off the lights and began to go to bed. As I laid in my bed, I felt a peaceful chill fill my whole body. I felt like I had goose bumps all over my body, but when I rubbed my skin, there were no bumps at all. I opened my eyes in the dark room, and hovering above me was that tall, dark, silhouette that I saw the first night when I first started praying my Novena. The first night I was overcome and terrified with fear, but this time I was without fear. Instead I was filled with a joy of peace. I turned over, laid on my back, and began talking to this powerful, yet beautiful angel. This darker silhouette didn’t talk back, but I just knew that this was my guardian angel. Not only that, but my angel’s silhouette was the same shape as the angelic cloud I saw the night before. I was so excited, so happy, and so peaceful to have such an incredibly majestic and powerful looking angel. So I began having a long talk with my guardian angel.

I laid there in absolute peace, in absolute comfort, and in absolute confidence. I knew at that moment that no matter what happened to me, I was going to be safe, in the arms of God’s love, and through the protection of the heavenly angels. *“For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you, in all your ways.” (Psalm 91:11)* Then, what came to my mind was the night in the jail cell. I thought of the very tall and powerful looking man who was in the jail cell with me, farting on me the whole night. I began to wonder if that was my guardian angel, surrounding me with protection (*granted it was smelly protection*). Furthermore, as I think about it, he was the only one in the cell that **never** said one word. He was the one guy who was always right next to my side. Where I sat, he sat. Where I laid down, he laid down. Maybe it was my guardian angel working through that man. We often pray for so many people, but how often do we pray for our guardian angels. We need to keep them in our prayers, as well as the almighty Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. And so as I spoke to my angel, I said the “Guardian Angel” prayer, which always seemed to me to be a child’s prayer. But when I said this prayer with my angel looking at me, it came alive in my heart. I found myself adding words to the childhood prayer of “Angel of God.”

*Angel of God, my dear guardian of all that is holy. God’s love for me has brought you here. Each and every day, be always next to me, no matter what the circumstance. Light the path God has in store for me. Guard me from all evil as I go down this path. Rule over me as I walk this path. And guide each step I take down this path. I*

*thank you for being my guardian angel. You are so strong and mighty, yet with a beauty that is so gentle. I am sorry for having ever put you in a situation that was uncomfortable or dangerous for you or for me, as you were always by my side. Help me aid you in your work by always saying "yes" to the Father.*

Through all these little gifts, and peeks at heaven, I continued daily with my unceasing prayer. It became easier and easier to do so, especially since through all the trials I was going through had demolished me to a form of nothingness. I began to realize that this is the state of mind that God wants us to be in, for it allows the soul to be truly open to prayer. When God takes the greatness that you are, all the pride that you allowed to build in your life, all the comforts of your routine life, and He demolishes all of that through humility, you become very humble. You almost feel like you are nothing, in a state of nothingness. It is through this humiliation, which I truly experienced, that humbles your soul to be truly open to God. Before this humbling experience, I had a lot in my life. I had a wonderful job, with wonderful people with whom I worked. I had positive feedback that reinforced my ego each day. I had friends I saw each day. I had my daily enjoyments. Yet through this extreme humility, all of that was demolished. The only thing I had now was God. And that is what He wanted. I knew I could receive him, in the Eucharist. And so, daily Mass became my best time of the day.

***Medjugorje message of April 3, 1986 "Dear children! I wish to call you to a living of the Holy Mass. There are many of you who have sensed the beauty of the Holy Mass, but there are also those who come unwillingly. I have chosen you, dear children, but Jesus gives you His graces in the Mass. Therefore, consciously live the Holy Mass and let your coming to it be a joyful one. Come to it with love and make the Mass your own. Thank you for having responded to my call."***

Before This, I always had trouble in seeing God's true presence in the Holy Eucharist. In my faith, I knew that the bread and wine were turned into the Body and Blood of Christ, and they were not just symbols. However, I never could see His presence, or really understand it. During those tough times, I would enter the church to daily Mass praying that I could better see His presence in the Holy Eucharist. As this prayer for wisdom and understanding continued, God kept enlightening my mind and soul. As I attended daily Mass, I started to gain a better understanding of His presence in the Eucharist. It is funny how God will send people or things your way, without your own effort, when you are asking God for certain growth or understanding in the faith. Thus, as a "wrap-up" to this new knowledge and understanding of Jesus' true presence in the Eucharist, God sent an article my way about an atheist's testimony on the Holy Eucharist. Furthermore, this article was just a precursor of another divine intervention God was about to send my way.

This testimony was about a Russian communist who did not believe in any God. She had no knowledge of Jesus Christ, let alone the Eucharist. She was hired by the state to "check out" what was going on in Medjugorje. As she arrived, she saw people from all

different cultures. It was night time, and because there were not many city lights like you may be used to, it was extra dark. But what she did see in the dimness of the night was a building (*the church*) where people were gathering. This “building” was overflowing with people. There was no room inside. However, as she looked through the large doors, there was an incredibly bright light at the front where these men in robes (*priests*) were handing out a small item to each person. She noticed that each person received and ate this item, which was also shimmering with the same radiance of light. She then noticed that as each person ate it, the light went down their throat, and resided in their chest, as if it were a disk of light. When the “men” were done handing those items out to each person, the church was filled with the light from each chest. It was such an intense light. She had no idea what was going on, but all she knew was that she had to have the same thing all those other people were receiving. She had witnessed a Eucharistic miracle. She then learned all about Jesus Christ, converted her life, and is a strong practicing Catholic, who receives that same Eucharist, that same “Light of the World”.<sup>8</sup>

This testimony sent an incredible peace and confidence in my heart, as I hope it does yours. Being excited about what I had read, I just had to share that story with someone. Since the only people that I was basically able to see and talk to were my parents, I told them about it. My parents and I were taking a late evening walk through the neighborhood when I just finished sharing this ‘Russian Spy’ testimony to my father. After I had finished telling him the story, I began to wonder if the testimony was for real. As I was thinking that, not five minutes after I had finished telling him about the story, we saw three ladies walking towards us, also taking an evening walk. Because it was dusk out, those ladies had little flashlights that were lighting their way. However, they were not your typical flashlights. The flashlights they were using hung around their necks like little necklaces, with what looked like glowing hockey-pucks hanging at chest level. Three ladies came walking our way, wearing disks of light at chest level, lighting the way as they walked. Immediately my dad and I turned to each other in awe, and we began laughing out loud, in joy, thinking about the story of the atheist’s testimony on the Eucharist. Wow! God has a great sense of humor, and loves to send His Divine Intervention upon things that He finds worthy.

A few days went by. I continued my unceasing prayer life and my journey of creating a new heart. The daily message from the prayer book that I was reading was all about getting to know The Blessed Mother better. When we get to know her better, we are better able to get to know her Son. The thing that confused me was the fact that there are many Christians out there that put down and show disrespect to Mary, the Mother of God. All I know is that if someone put down my mother, I would be ready to defend her name, even if it meant physical intervention. And I am not a physical type of person. So just imagine how Jesus feels when His Blessed Mother is put down, rejected, ridiculed, and criticized. I love our Blessed Mother, but I honestly did not know much about her, due to her humbleness, which is just one example of how we are to live our lives. Anytime people turn to her, she immediately directs them toward her son, saying, “*Do whatever He tells you.*” (*John 2:5*) Just like a mirror, she simply reflects the goodness of her Son, Jesus. “*She is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of His goodness*” (*Wisdom 7:25-26*). And so I began reading books about Mary, the Mother of the Church. Just like my prayers to better understand God’s presence

in the Eucharist, I was praying to better understand, and praying to get to know Mary, the Mother of God.

After Mass that day, I went to sit by the pond, next to the church, to do some meditative prayer. As I sat there in meditation, I asked Mary to better reveal herself to me. Again, by reading the Medjugorje magazine, some answers came my way. One of the articles was about a talk one of the visionaries gave. In that presentation, the visionary explained her answer to the commonly asked question of what Our Blessed Mother looks like. She explained that she has seen hundreds of posters, drawings, paintings, sculptures, and art forms trying to depict Our Lady. However, everything she has seen is disgusting compared to what she truly looks like. This visionary was not capable of describing Mary's beauty.

Once, one of the visionaries asked Our Blessed Mother why she is so beautiful. Our Lady responded by saying, "I am beautiful because I love."<sup>9</sup> As I sat by the pond, eyes closed, meditating on what it would be like to see this beauty that the visionary couldn't even come close to describing, I began to think of all that Mary was and did. She was a young teenager when God sent an angel to her. She was scared when the angel told her she was going to bear the child of God, but she said, "*Let it be done to me according to Thy word*" (Luke 1:38). Every time the Lord called on Mary, she always responded with a fervent "YES". Mary conceived of the baby Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. She gave birth to the Son of God. She cared for Him and raised Him. She was there, right by His side as He died for our transgressions. A sword pierced her own heart. She was then given to all of us through John, at the foot of the cross. And Mary became our mother and the Mother of the Church. Mary is so pure and so Holy.

In heaven, beauty is not a factor of how much money you have to coat your exterior being with beautiful things. Instead, beauty is a reflection of the spirit. Thus, contemplating on Mary's beauty, I realized that we are also invited to become beautiful. Our exterior beauty will be in direct correlation with our inner beauty, and how much we love. The more we love, the more beautiful we will be. Therefore, the next time you decide to reach out to those who are in need, you may just be earning a makeover in heaven. The next time you decide to comfort the suffering and rejected, you may just be setting an appointment with the hair stylist in heaven. The next time you are cheerful in a world without cheer, you may just be earning a shopping spree at a formal clothing store in heaven. Or the next time you pray for and forgive your enemies, or the next time you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, or visit the imprisoned, you may just be earning a face lift in heaven. Therefore, we should not be so concerned as to our present beauty here on earth, but we should be more concerned about how beautiful we will be once we reach heaven.

As I sat by the pond, with my eyes closed, I reflected on what her beauty must be like. I thought that since in heaven, beauty is the reflection of the soul, her beauty must stand out from all other beauty. When I opened my eyes, I saw, floating on the pond right in front of me, a gray duck right next to a large and elegant swan. The brightness of the sun reflected the whiteness of the swan even more dramatically. It was then that I got a small glimpse of what her beauty must be like. There was the gray duck. Then you had the swan, which was so much larger, so much more elegant, and with the shining rays of

the sun, reflected its pure white beauty. Wow, Mary! I can't wait to see you with heavenly eyes! You are full of beauty, which comes from your purity.

*Annual Apparition to Mirjana Soldo on March 18, 2002 "Dear Children! As a mother I implore you, open your heart and offer it to me, and fear nothing. **I will be with you and will teach you how to put Jesus in the first place. I will teach you to love Him and to belong to Him completely.** Comprehend, dear children, that without my Son there is no salvation. You should become aware that He is your beginning and your end. Only with this awareness can you be happy and merit eternal life. As your mother I desire this for you. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>10</sup>*

Because Mary is the mother of Jesus, and since Jesus is God, Mary is the Mother of God. She is our sweetness. God raised this sweet, pure, loving mother, body and soul, into heaven, and crowned her Queen Mother. To understand the title, "Queen Mother", one needs to look at the stories of the Old Testament. The title "Queen" was not given to the wife of the King. Contrary to today's world, when we think of the King and Queen, we immediately think husband and wife. However in Biblical times, the Queen was the mother of the king, not the wife. Since Mary is the mother of the King of Kings, her true title is the Queen Mother. And it is the Queen Mother who intercedes for us as she takes our requests to the King. This is why we so often ask Mary to pray for us. For when the Queen Mother goes to the King, who is her son, He will not refuse her requests. An example of this is found in King David's story.

Remember that Bathsheba was the girl King David took in as his lover and as one of his wives, in a way that God was not pleased. King David had many sons through many wives, including Bathsheba. At the end of King David's life, there was a semi-battle going on with who was going to be the next King. David was pretty much out of it, mentally, so he didn't really know what was going on. It was in God's plan that Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, would be the next king. However, Adonijah, one of King David's other sons, through the wife of Haggith, was already taking over power, without King David even realizing it. When Bathsheba went to tell King David what was happening, the interactions between Bathsheba and David are interesting to study. Remember that Bathsheba was one of King David's wives. However, when she entered King David's room, she bowed down to him and paid him homage, at which King David responded, "What do you want?" This shows that there is not too much honor shown to the wife of the king. (Read about it in *1King1:11-21*) However, after David dies, and Solomon becomes King, the interaction between Bathsheba and the king is quite different.

Since Solomon is the new king, Bathsheba is no longer the wife of the king, but rather, she is the mother of the king. She is now the Queen mother. One day, Adonijah, the one who was trying to claim kingship, asked Bathsheba to take a request to the king. Bathsheba found the request acceptable, so she agreed to intercede for him. When Bathsheba entered the king's room to request this favor for Adonijah, the interaction between Bathsheba and the king was quite different. When Bathsheba entered, the king was the one who got up from his throne, bowed down to her, paid her homage, and had her sit in the throne, at the right hand of the king. During Biblical times, when one was

seated at the right hand, they were the ones with authority. So Bathsheba, sitting at the right hand of the king, is then asked by the king, "What can I do for you?" This change in honor is because she is the mother of the king. Thus, her title is the Queen. When she asked of the request, the king had no reply except to say, "I will do what you wish." (Read about it in 1King2:12-25) Therefore, Mary, the mother of the King of Kings, is our Queen Mother. She intercedes for us, taking our petitions and prayers to the King.

*Medjugorje message for May 25, 1997 "Dear children! Today I invite you to glorify God and for the Name of God to be holy in your hearts and in your life. Little children, when you are in the holiness of God, He is with you and gives you peace and joy which come only from God through prayer. That is why, little children, renew prayer in your families and your heart will glorify the holy Name of God and heaven will reign in your heart. **I am close to you and I intercede for you before God.** Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>11</sup>*

After coming to an understanding of the title of Queen Mother, I could finally understand why we constantly ask Mary to pray for us. She is our interceder and advocate. Sitting by the pond, as I began praying the Joyful mysteries, the prayer, "Hail Mary", took on a new dimension. Instead of just rambling through that prayer, I concentrated on each phrase, adding some words to make it come more alive in my heart.

*Hail Mary, you are overflowing with God's grace and a beauty with which you fill our lives. Because of your purity and your faithfulness, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, because you always said a fervent "YES" to God whenever He called on you, always being faithful to Him. And just as the ancient Ark of the Covenant and tabernacle of God is blessed, so too is the fruit of your womb blessed, which carried the Son of God. Holy Mary, Queen Mother of God, I offer you my prayers and petitions to give to the King of Kings, if you find them acceptable. Pray for these prayers of us sinners, now, always, and especially at the hour of our death. -Amen-*

Because prayer is a way of expressing love to God, we often ask others to pray for us. It is not that we think the more prayers there are, the more God will be influenced to answer those prayers. Rather, it is a greater expression of love that you want to occur. We are called to "pray for one another" (James 5:16). These prayers, of people praying for specific needs, become a chorus of love that is raised to heaven. Therefore, when we want someone to pray for us, to share in that chorus of love, it seems logical to have Mary, the saints, and the angels to pray for us, all of whom have the perfect love for God. When we pray to Mary, to the saints, and to the angels, we are not worshipping them, but rather we are asking them to pray for us. Who better to ask for intercession of prayer than the Mother of God, as well as all the saints and angels. The more love that is expressed, the easier it is for us to respond to God's response to our prayers.

This high honor given to Mary is shown when the Angel Gabriel greeted Mary by saying, “*Hail, favored one!*” (Luke 1:28) This was a title that was being pronounced from the great Archangel Gabriel. Mary was given the title, “Favored one who is full of Grace.” In this greeting, it shows that Mary is the one who has “*found favor with God*” (Luke 1:30). She is the one who is “*blessed among women*” (Luke 1:42) because the “Lord is with her” (Luke 1:28). Therefore, “the Holy Spirit will come upon” her and “*the power of the Most High will overshadow*” her. (Luke 1:35) Through this union between Mary and the Holy Spirit, she becomes the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and the “*mother of our Lord*” (Luke 1:43). Furthermore, when the angel requests of Mary to conceive the Son of God, she responds by saying, “*May it be done to me according to Thy word*” (Luke 1:38). She never wavered from doing the will of God, always teaching us to “*Do whatever he tells you*” (John. 2:5).

Mary intercedes for us to her Divine Son. This power as intercessor is demonstrated at the wedding of Cana, in John 2:1-12. Jesus responds to her mother’s requests, which becomes the first sign that reveals His glory. It is also in this intercession for the wedding guests that His disciples come to “*believe in Him*” (John 2:11). For these reasons, as well as many more, the Blessed Virgin warrants our utmost devotion. But again, it cannot be reinforced enough; we should not worship her, but rather we should show devotion to her. This high honor of devotion is totally inferior to adoration, and must never be connected to it. Adoration is reserved only for God. Adoration is the worship and praise given to God.

My solitary life of prayer continued, the loneliness began building within me again. As usual, I went to my “holy place” to do my noontime prayer. I was sitting at the pond outside the church, and I was beginning to wonder about all that I had experienced. I began wondering what was going to happen to me. Some difficult feelings and thoughts started entering my mind. As I sat by the pond, eyes closed, I began wondering if God truly had His hand in guiding the outcome of all that was happening. I felt like my entire future was in the hands of the humans who were about to judge my case. I wondered if Mary and Jesus were truly with me at all times. As I was thinking that thought, a loud squawk, right in front of me, made me open my eyes. Sitting in the pond five feet from me was the beautiful white swan that had just belted out a loud “quack!” I just felt it was Mary saying, “You better believe we are always with you!” *Thank you Mary, and thank you Jesus for always being next to me. I may not be able to see you, but thank you for letting me know that you are always there.* To add to the wonder of all this, which took place in April, Mary’s message for that month was the following:

***Medjugorje message for April 25, 2002 "Dear children! Rejoice with me in this time of spring when all nature is awakening and your hearts long for change. Open yourselves, little children, and pray. Do not forget that I am with you and I desire to take you all to my Son that He may give you the gift of sincere love towards God and everything that is from Him. Open yourselves to prayer and seek a conversion of your hearts from God; everything else He sees and provides. Thank you for having responded to my call."***<sup>12</sup>

Those gifts and signs God had given me throughout the weeks were great confirmations to me. However, I began to worry a little bit as to why I was receiving so many of them. I knew I was going through some rough times, but I began wondering if it was going to get a lot worse. I began thinking whether I would end up having to remember those gifts to help pull me through even more extreme trials that were yet to come, or were they just simple confirmations to pull me through my present struggles. One day, as I was thinking that, I pulled out the two religious items that I always carried with me.

***Medjugorje message for July 18, 1985 "Dear children! Today I call you to place more blessed objects in your homes and that everyone put some blessed objects on their person. Bless all the objects and thus Satan will attack you less because you will have armor against him. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>13</sup>***

In one pocket, I carried my rosary; the one that had turned to gold. In the other pocket, I carried a palm-sized crucifix. It is a very special crucifix to me. I had this crucifix blessed by the bishop. I would regularly use this crucifix as a visual aid during many of my lessons to my students. It is a black and silver Benedictine crucifix that I bought at a religious conference. I had never seen a palm-sized crucifix that was so detailed with beauty. As I sat there staring and meditating on that crucifix, and thinking about all those wonderful signs God was giving me, I thought how amazing it would be if the silver on the crucifix turned to gold. It was a quick thought that entered my mind, which was quickly followed by my telling God to forget what I had just thought. I felt like that thought was a form of testing Him. In my mind, I apologized for even thinking such a selfish thing.

A couple days later, my father and I attended a religious workshop about Mary in scripture, which is where I learned so much about Mary. There was a girl there that I recognized. I didn't know her name, but she came up to me and introduced herself. We started talking, only to find out that we both knew this girl that I used to teach with, who was brutally murdered the previous year. When she asked me whether I was still teaching, I told her that I was not, due to some bad choices I made. I thought that since my story was so well known in town, I just assumed that she put two and two together, and knew that I was the teacher charged with ordering child-pornography. After that, there was not much further interaction between the two of us.

However, the following day, after the workshop had finished, she came up to me and said, "I want to give you something to wear to help pull you through your trying times." She continued by saying, "My friend gave me this gift during one of my struggles of life, and I want to pass it on to you." When she finished saying that, she pulled out a palm-sized crucifix. It was the exact same palm-sized Benedictine crucifix that I carried around with me. It was the exact same! However, the one she gave me was pure gold! I just couldn't believe it. God showed me that He could turn it to gold. Through Him, all things are possible.

## Chapter 9

### Pick Up Your Cross And Follow Me

*Jesus Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)* Jesus carried the ultimate cross, for upon his shoulders he bore the weight of the sins of all mankind. On that cross, he bore the sins of every human that ever lived. He bore the sins of every human that is yet to live. He bore your sins, and he bore my sins. He bore the sins that we haven't even committed yet. He bore it all; the hatred, the anger, the ridicule, the gossip, the lying, the cheating, the stealing, the pride, the materialism, the greed, the sloth, the neglect, the violence, the murder, the premarital sex, the adultery, the lust, the abuse. He bore it all, so that through his sufferings we may be healed. In a tiny way, we can lift a small burden of His cross by carrying our own crosses with love. So when trials and persecutions come our way, we should *"rejoice to the extent that we share in the sufferings of Christ"* (1Peter 4:13). For God tells us that if we want to be His disciples, we need to *"take up our cross, and follow him"* (Matthew 16:24).

***Medjugorje message of September 25, 1996 "Dear children! Today I invite you to offer your crosses and suffering for my intentions. Little children, I am your mother and I wish to help you by seeking for you the grace from God. Little children, offer your sufferings as a gift to God so they become a most beautiful flower of joy. That is why, little children, pray that you may understand that suffering can become joy and the cross the way of joy. Thank you for having responded to my call."***

On March 15th, when the FBI knocked on my door, they not only handed me a search warrant, but out of justice, they also handed me my cross. This carrying of my cross involved a long and continuous journey down an ever-changing path. The first part of that path was to find a job. Not only did I need a job for the requirements of bond, but I also needed a job to pay my bills. Day after day I hit the pavement looking for a job. Those were long, grueling, and depressing days, usually accompanied by cold and drizzly rain showers. I was applying to minimum wage jobs that I did not want to work. I filled out application after application, with no responses or desire from those businesses to hire me. I couldn't even get a fast food restaurant to find interest in hiring me. This was very hurtful and degrading to my ego. However, this was part of God's discipline for the pride that I built up in myself, for *"Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord; I assure you that he will not go unpunished"* (Proverbs 16:5). *"He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly"*. (Luke 1:52) What is interesting is the fact that everyone was made aware of my sins of the flesh, but what was not made aware were my sins of pride. However, it was being made more and more aware to me.

I had built up so much pride in my teaching career that I was no longer teaching for the glory of God, but rather for the glory of myself. A lot of the effort I put forth in my

teaching seemed to have become a result of wanting to be worshipped by the students I taught. Without really knowing it, I was seeking to be loved, and looked upon highly, by my students, making me a mini-god. Through the gifts and talents God gave me in the field of teaching, I was receiving a lot of glory, which was constantly adding to my structure of pride that I was building. Therefore, God brought His hand down to destroy that pride.

Day after day, with my pride destroyed, I continued to search for jobs. It was frustrating not to get any response. I applied anywhere and everywhere. I applied to fast food restaurants. I applied to home improvement stores. I applied to convenient stores. I applied to maintenance jobs. After applying to close to a hundred jobs, I decided to put in an application at a Catholic Retreat Center as a yard keeper. This was one of the places where I attended daily Mass. However, once they found out my name, they were not even willing to see me. They informed me that the position was filled. However, as I called them the following day, as an anonymous caller, they informed me that the job was still open and that they were still taking applications. That was painful to find out. But even more so, I found out that one of the lay staff at that Center informed the other staff members that I was the “child-pornographer”, and to keep an eye on me while I was on their property. I was informed that information by another worker there that I gained a friendship with. I had felt so rejected. I just wanted acceptance, and I was hoping that I could get it from the members in the Church. Granted, this was a bad experience, but I also had some critically positive experiences with other members of the Church.

It was a result of many members of the Church that helped guide me, strengthen me, and support me, which helped me survive this tribulation in my life. However, it didn't come from certain members of the Church whom I felt I needed it from the most. To add to the piercing of the heart, when I did cross paths with some of those members, I was either totally ignored or coldly glared at. This made me think of people who had left the church based on bad experiences with some of the congregation. I know the most popular comment people will say is that, “We are all sinners, and that I need to pray for them.” However, that didn't help ease the pain. I know that we are all sinners, and that we need to seek a continued conversion, and that there is always room for one more sinner. I knew all this, but it still didn't help the hurt of feeling rejected, judged and outcast.

*Medjugorje message of March 25, 1999 "Dear children! I call you to prayer with the heart. In a special way, little children, **I call you to pray for conversion of sinners, for those who pierce my heart and the heart of my Son Jesus with the sword of hatred and daily blasphemies. Let us pray, little children, for all those who do not desire to come to know the love of God, even though they are in the Church.** Let us pray that they convert, so that the Church may resurrect in love. Only with love and prayer, little children, can you live this time which is given to you for conversion. Place God in the first place, then the risen Jesus will become your friend. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>12</sup>

I continued to persevere in my job search. I had a couple companies finally show interest in me, as I was invited for an interview. However, when I told them about my

situation, which is what I was required to do, those interviews came to a quick end. This job searching, interviewing, and rejection, continued day after day for a few weeks until I finally had a door open. During the interview, I told them about my situation, just like all the other interviews I had gone through. I was expecting the interview to end right there and then. However, I finally saw a workplace show compassion. They were willing to hire me. Granted, it was a job I didn't want to work, but it was a job that paid money and fulfilled my bond requirements. So I became a cashier at a big box retailer, entering a new path with the cross I was bearing.

Each morning, upon waking from my night's sleep, I would be blasted with all types of feelings that reminded me of the nightmare I was living. It was a constant and routine reality check as I would be overwhelmed with feelings of sorrow, fear, helplessness, depression, and loneliness. I had no control over those feelings, as they would all take control at the same time, overwhelm my heart, mind and soul with an agony of anxiety. Those feelings were so intense that it would literally take my breath away, cause my heart to pound irregularly, and force my body to tremble, which was always accompanied by a river of tears. I would also experience those feelings through my nights of sleep, as I would be awakened from nightmare after nightmare. Sometimes I would have two, three or even four nightmares in one night. My erratic breathing would wake me up, followed by an unexplainable anxiety. I just couldn't get away from that burden, whether during my waking hours, or my sleeping hours.

Since my sleep wasn't refreshing, I decided to wake up a couple hours early each morning, and spend that time in prayer. That helped me gain strength to pick up my cross for the daily journey. I would then go to work, and I would labor away, doing tasks that took me back to my high school days. I felt so rejected, thinking that the best I could do was to hold a job that was similar to my first job in high school. My ego was hurt, knowing that I had six years of college and six years of professional experience. However, God again was casting down the mighty from his throne, helping me grow in humility.

Before each day of work, I consecrated my day to God. My goal in this consecration was to have Christ fully immersed in me, with the desire that I could reflect Him to others in all my words, thoughts and deeds. Furthermore, I asked Him to help give me the strength to persevere. I asked Him to help me carry my cross with love and humbleness. And so, with the best of my ability, I would display the kindness of Christ's love to each person. That was very hard to do at times. I greeted each customer and employee with a friendly smile and kind words, only to be followed by uptight, ugly, and non-respondent faces. I would try to show Christ's love to each person as I graciously served each customer's demands and orders. Granted, I did come across some very nice people. However, I do not exaggerate when I say a good ninety-five percent of the customers displayed rudeness in one way or another. Most of the rude actions I received consisted of upturned and snobby noses, ignoring any kind words or actions I offered them. In addition to that, I also received, on a regular basis, people yelling demands and complaints at me. I even had people throw items at me, such as driver's licenses, pens, checks, and shopping goods, as they literally bounced off my chest. I felt like I was being treated like an uneducated high school dropout. However, that statement is a little too generous to the customer. In reality, I felt like I was being treated like a dog. But once again, God enlightened my thoughts, for the word "dog" spelled backwards is "God".

Therefore, I would take those rude interactions of people treating me like a dog, and I would try my best to turn it around and treat them with the humble love that could only come from God.

*Medjugorje message of September 25, 2001 "Dear children! Also today I call you to prayer, especially today when Satan wants war and hatred. I call you anew, little children: pray and fast that God may give you peace. **Witness peace to every heart and be carriers of peace in this world without peace.** I am with you and intercede before God for each of you. And you do not be afraid because the one who prays is not afraid of evil and has no hatred in the heart. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>3</sup>

Interaction after interaction continued, and I just saw a huge lack of peace in this world. There was one day, a typical day, in which I did a little statistical study. I tallied, on a sheet of paper, the amount of times I said "please" and "thank you". I also tallied the amount of times I received a "please" or "thank you" from the customer. In one day's work, I said "please", 304 times, and "thank you", 421 times. In return, I received 23 "pleases" and 31 "thank yous". This was very difficult for me, for I had always taught my students to be polite and respectful. I was trying my best to grow in the virtue of perseverance, humility, and charity in all those interactions. However, I just wanted to give up. But then, God's words of what it means to be a true Christian kept replaying in my mind. "*When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we respond gently*". (1 Corinthians 4:12-13) Thus, I continued to try my best at being a clear reflection of Christ, which of course could only be done through His grace.

As each day progressed, I tried my best to carry this cross. I found no excitement to go to work. Each day I offered it up to God. I would try my hardest to display His love to each person that came through my checkout line. And for all the people that were rude towards me, I would say a quiet prayer for them. Granted, this didn't work all the time, for there were times when I simply told the customer, "Cheer up. Life could be worse. You could be a cashier." Or there were times when I told the customer that I could not tell the difference between their actions and the actions of a two-year-old throwing a tantrum. There were times when I would try to teach manners to the customers. When they would demand something without saying please, I would try to teach them to say please. But what I soon came to realize is that "*a senseless man loves not to be reproved*" (Proverbs 15:12). Not happy with myself when I failed to be Christ-like and of course being disciplined by my manager and almost fired several times, I would simply continue to do my best in growing in charity, perseverance and humility. And God was giving me plenty of opportunities to do so.

I continued to accept demands, complaints, rude comments, and daggers of unhappy faces from uptight and angry customers in a humble way. I tried my hardest never to return the ugliness, but to simply return a humble heart saying, "As you wish". No matter what the rude action was, I would still greet them with a warm, "Hello! How are you today?" And I would end the interaction with, "Have a peaceful day!" I knew that this was the greatest form of sacrifice that I could offer up to God. To be a servant to all people, which are all His people. Through my serving, in a Christ-like way, I began to

live a life of humility instead of a life of pride, which was opposite from what I was living before all this happened. *“Before his downfall, a man’s heart is haughty, but humility goes before honors.” (Proverbs 18:12)*

This job as a cashier was such a drastic change in lifestyle. When I was teaching, 95% of all my experiences throughout the day consisted of charitable, caring, and peaceful interactions. Now, it was flip-flopped as 95% of my daily experiences consisted of rude, selfish and impatient interactions. After several weeks of trying to persevere, I began to feel disgust for the world. I began to see a world that lacked so much love, and a nation that was so materialistic, egocentric and selfish. There were many times when I just wanted God to come and destroy all of us. I simply felt that we were not worthy of God’s love. I had witnessed so much hatred, so much anger, and so much lack of peace. When I went to Mass that Sunday, only to see a church filled with many of those uptight customers I served, I was ready to explode.

Everywhere I looked, I saw a face that I recognized as a customer. Each face I saw reminded me of the rudeness and lack of peace they displayed. Yet here they were, displaying a happy smile for all to see, proclaiming the love of Christ in their lives. Through those same faces that proclaimed the love of Christ, came the evil that displayed anger and ugliness to their fellow man.

I had a difficult time sitting through that Mass. Then, at the end of Mass, when the priest announced that a nun would like to say a few words to the congregation about missionaries, the faces I remembered at the store started to be displayed. They didn’t want to spend five minutes listening to a nun. They had done their Mass for the week. They were ready to get on with their day. They began rustling in their seats, not paying attention, looking at their watches, and their faces of “fake smiles” started to turn towards the faces that I remembered seeing, which was an ugly, uptight, and impatient display. However, as soon as the nun was finished speaking, their “peaceful smiles” returned. Ironically, the reading for the day was, *“Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away. For this reason I smote them through the prophets, I slew them by the words of my mouth.” (Hosea 6:4-5)* I sat there in disgust, only to realize that I was doing exactly what I was complaining about. I was displaying anger and disgust toward this entire congregation. I was sitting there in judgment and ridicule. Boy did I have a hard time at Mass that day. I just did not feel God’s presence. I felt the opposite of God’s presence.

After Mass was done, I felt that I had offended God through my thoughts and judgments. I didn’t want to have those thoughts, but they were being pounded into my mind. I was simply frustrated with the thoughts of which I could not rid. Feeling bad, I decided to go to the pond where I did so much of my praying after Mass. This was the same pond where I saw the white swan that so resembled Mary.

When I arrived at the pond, I sat down at the same bench where I always sat. I was hoping to see the white swan, for it was symbolic to me that Mary and Jesus were right next to me. As I sat there, I just poured out my frustrations to God, which is a type of prayer that God also wants to hear. He wants to hear our joys, our successes and our happiness. However, he also wants us to take our pains, angers and frustrations to Him as well. I told God that I was sick and tired of feeling no peace, feeling no joy, and feeling no love. I told God that I was getting weak with all the temptations that were blasting me from every direction. I couldn’t find the words to pray. I had little desire to even

contemplate in true prayer. Furthermore when I tried to pray, I had those judging thoughts enter my mind.

In frustration, which caused fingernail marks in the palms of my hands, I angrily asked God why I couldn't break those feelings?!?! Right then, I saw a six-foot snake swim across the surface of the water. This snake had any place along the shore of the pond to exit, but it came right to where I was sitting. It exited the water and sat three feet away from me. I immediately stood up and called on the power of God to cast Satan away. Just then, the snake dove into the water and disappeared. I had a very scary feeling surround me. I felt like a shadow from every direction was closing in on me. I immediately got out of there, which is exactly what we all need to do when temptations of sin start biting at us. "*Flee from sin as from a serpent that will bite you if you go near it. Its teeth are lion's teeth, destroying the souls of men.*" (Sirach 21:2)

*Medjugorje message of September 25, 1987 "Dear children! Today also I want to call you all to prayer. Let prayer be your life. Dear children, dedicate your time only to Jesus and He will give you everything that you are seeking. He will reveal Himself to you in fullness. Dear children, **Satan is strong and is waiting to test each one of you. Pray, and that way he will neither be able to injure you nor block you on the way of holiness.** Dear children, through prayer grow all the more toward God from day to day. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>4</sup>

Through those struggles, God saw the healing that I so desired. I wanted to be healed of those judgmental thoughts. I wanted healing and reconciliation with the community. I wanted healing from all my burdens. With those constant frustrations, I continued to persevere, trying my best to be kind and Christ-like as I worked in a job that I did not enjoy. As I persevered, I started to see former students, parents, faculty and friends who had all been affected by this tribulation. Slowly, but surely, I was able to interact with those people as they went through my checkout line. Whether I realized it or not, I was on a journey of reconciliation and healing. I was able to tell those people how I cared for them, missed them, thought about them, and most importantly that I was able to apologize to them. When things seemed to get overwhelming, God would send me one of those people to help brighten my day. Just as Simon of Cyrene helped carry Christ's cross, so too were these people helping me carry my cross. They lifted a small burden as they told me how they missed me, and were praying for me. I looked forward to seeing whom God would send through my line each day. As each day progressed, I had compassionate, caring, and loving hearts console my troubling soul as they went out of their way to show a merciful heart.

*Annual Apparition of Our Lady to Mirjana Soldo on March 18, 2001: "Dear children! Today I call you to love and mercy. Give love to each other as your Father gives it to you. **Be merciful (pause) - with the heart. Do good works, not permitting them to wait for you too long. Every mercy that comes from the heart brings you closer to my Son.**"*<sup>5</sup>

As this form of healing progressed, some of the people from the school community reached out their hand to me in ways I had not expected. People I didn't even know reached out their compassion to me. There was one family that invited me to their home for dinner. There was another person of the school community that spent hours on the phone with me. To some of these people, I was basically a stranger, but they kept in contact with me through letters. What these people did for me is exactly what God wants us to do to each other, for He says, *"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me. When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was ill, you cared for me. And when I was in prison, you visited me."* (Matthew 25:35-36, 40)

Just as Christ had consoling people along his journey of carrying the cross, so too did I have people who brought me compassion. However, Jesus was also surrounded by people who spat on Him, hit Him, threw rocks at Him, and yelled at Him, as they added to His suffering. Maybe he allowed himself to experience his passion and death so that each one of us can relate to Him when we go through our times of trouble. These were the same people who a few days earlier were waving palm branches and singing a greeting fit for a king as He came riding into town. These were the same people that Jesus cared for, taught, fed, consoled and healed. Again, I was able to relate to Christ's sufferings, for I also had people who added to my sufferings. Granted, my sufferings and hurts seemed warranted in the eyes of the world, and Jesus' were not. There seemed to be several people who had built in their mind, an image of me that wiped away the facts they knew about me. They knew how much of my heart and soul went into my teaching and caring for the children. They were witnesses to the wonderful achievements God did through me in the classroom. However, several of these people were the same ones who added to my suffering.

The interactions that added the most pain to my sufferings came from those whom I had acquaintance. I had faculty members, parents and people who I thought would be my supporting friends, go out of their way to avoid any interaction, as they were required to pass by me to get out of the store on the days that I was a door greeter. I had parents staring and pointing fingers at me as they talked to some people they were with, making me feel like an animal. I had parents forcefully hide their child behind them as they walked out the store, giving me a glaring evil stare. I had parents who were in my line, but when notified by their child that I was the cashier, would get out of line and go to another line. I had people notify my supervisor at work about my situation, of which they already knew. But they continued by telling the supervisor that they would not shop at the store while I was employed. I had other people ask the first employee that they saw, the entrance door greeter, if I was working. They would then tell the employee, whoever it was, that they didn't want to be in the store if I was working. I had a parent throw a fountain drink all over me. I also had children, who would normally run up and greet me, now scared to see me, as they would quickly distance themselves from me. Many of those people already had a judgment of me set in their minds. This was confirmed through a conversation I had with someone whom I thought was a close and supporting friend. During the conversation, they asked me if I ever harmed a child, at which I told them that I never did, nor would I ever harm a child. However, my answer did not match

up with the image they had created in their mind as they asked me that same question three more times throughout the conversation. Each time I responded, “I have never harmed a child”, it became more aware to me that their mind was closed, and they already had a verdict in their mind, that I had harmed a child.

The “quick-to-judge” actions from these people, who seemed to have built an evil image of me in their mind, were painful to my heart. Oh how easy it is to “*notice the splinter in each other’s eye, yet not perceive the wooden beam in our own eye*” (Matthew 7:3). However, I do believe that several of those people simply ignored me because they did not know what to say, so they simply said nothing. This was a response of indifference, which is a hurtful and devastating sin that we do to each other. Being indifferent is nothing more than a controlled rage. It is definitely not a form of forgiveness. I realized that those responses of silence, resentment, indifference, anger, hatred, and judgment are some of the typical human responses. However, none of those are pleasing to God. Through those interactions, or lack thereof, I began to feel worthless. And so God also has some words about people who respond in this “typical human way”, as He says, “*Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me. For what you did not do to the least of my brothers, you did not do for me.* (Matthew 25:41-43, 45) Through this scripture, I felt justified in having those angry feelings. Yet at the same time, those bad experiences made me think of how I had judged, or how I had simply buried my head in the sand and said nothing to someone who needed me, or how I had acted cruelly to someone in need. Thus, God’s message of the final judgment, in Matthew 25:40, came back to haunt my own mind. For I was not able to recall many times when I fed, gave drink, visited or cared for the least of His brothers. Again, God showed me my sins through His eyes.

Although God had sent wonderful people to bring me compassion, I seemed to focus on the negative interactions. I tried very hard to thank God, and to focus on the compassionate people He had sent to me. Yet, as hard as I tried, my thoughts were concentrated on the negative. Why is it, when given the good and the bad, we focus on the bad? Why is it that we can never be satisfied? This is nothing new for mankind. We seem to always focus and look for the bad in any given situation. I found myself living this way, but also found myself experiencing it from others, on a regular basis. For example, one customer rudely complained to me, stating that the cash register rung up the television she was buying as \$299.99, but the price tag, which was already a hundred dollar discount for being a floor model, said that it was \$299.50. This boggled my mind, as it was only a whopping 45-cent difference on a materialistic item that was already discounted a hundred dollars. This was just one example of humans never being satisfied. “*Bad, bad!*” says the buyer; but once he has gone his way, he boasts. (Proverbs 20:14)

This unhappiness goes back to biblical times. Think of the Israelites and when they were freed from slavery. Their first display of gratitude was when they said, “It’s about time.” The Heavenly Father sent food from heaven to cure their hunger, at which they responded, “What’s this healthy crap? How about some hamburgers, or chicken?” So God gave them quail, at which they further complained about not having anything to drink. Thus, God gave them water from a rock, at which they showed their thanks by

building and worshipping a golden calf. Why is it, since the history of mankind, that we are never satisfied? Why is it, when given a cup half full, we say that it is almost empty? I am no professional in these areas, but my general thought, and through my own experiences of acting this way, I believe it is a reflection of how we feel about ourselves. We cannot believe that someone would accept us for the good that we are, simply because we cannot accept ourselves. Because we cannot accept ourselves, anyone who comes along to offer their love, we do not accept either. Why would someone else love me, if I cannot love myself? However, God accepts us for who we are, for He made us, and God does not make mistakes. He accepts all our lives, whether we are cheaters, liars, stealers, gossipers, drug users, prosecutors, or postal inspectors. However, we just have a hard time accepting ourselves, as we wallow in an ocean of our own misery. Through prayer, and through a constant journey toward seeking the face of God, maybe we will get tired of wallowing in our own weariness and we will accept the fact of who we are. We are a judgmental, unfortunate, beautiful, rude, caring, insensitive, living human beings that have been forgiven through Christ's salvation.

I continued to pray for the ability to focus on the positive instead of the ridicule and judgment that left the mouths of many people in the community, which reached my ears. I tried to focus on the good, but the gossip, which is so damaging, left wounds that needed healing. When we talk bad about other people, God feels that, for He is in each one of us. Therefore, when we put down, gossip, and ridicule other people, we are doing that to and about God. It may be a simple sentence, but can grow to a torment of pain. *"Consider how small a fire can set a huge forest ablaze. The tongue is also a fire. No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God."* (James 2:6,8-9)

The pain of hearing some of the things said about me, from people I would have least expected, weighed heavily on my mind. Now that I seemed to be a centerpiece for ridicule, I experienced the evil of gossip. *"For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness, but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak."* (Matthew 12: 34-36). All those negative interactions and uninvited information then led to the miserable nightmares in which I would wake up in a body trembling, heart throbbing, and erratic breathing sleep. My feelings of excitement to see people I knew had changed to weariness. When I came in contact with people I knew, I did not know how they felt toward me. So in a confused state, I would simply ask God to be part of those interactions. All I could do was pray to God, asking him to heal the hearts of all those who had gained anger and hatred because of all that had happened.

From those experiences, I learned a few important points to incorporate into my own life for when I would come across someone who is suffering or going through a tribulation. First of all, don't worry about being an expert. Just be available for the person who is suffering. They may ask questions of "why" that may make you feel like you need to be an expert. However, the real questions that are in their minds are questions of "how". How can I make it through this? How can I continue? How can I survive? They just need someone to be available, to be a refuge. God is the ultimate refuge, but we can allow God to work through us so that we can be a refuge for those that suffer. Already

wounded and hurting by self-infliction of sorrow, the suffering need a place to hide. But what usually comes is the most devastating lashes of all, which is dealt by others. The pain increases when we hear the whisperings of others. The thought of what other people are saying makes the load more than we can bear. It is called gossip. And the last thing suffering people need are critics. They already hurt enough. They don't need more guilt or shame added to their despair. Rather, they need encouragement from a willing and caring heart. So be slow to speak and quick to listen. *"A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse one crushes the spirit."* (Proverb 15:4)

Being a teacher, I learned to take the role as a counselor. I learned that in difficult times, it is not so much the correct words that need to be said, but rather the correct responses. Those that are suffering do not need complex explanations on how to deal with their situation. Instead, they need a hand to hold. They need a hug; a shoulder to cry on. And when you do speak, may your words always make it so that their eyes are kept toward the focus of heaven. Those that suffer need gentle reminders that God is in control, and that God is a God of love.

I knew God loved me. I knew God was in control. However, I simply wanted all of this to end. Yet the funny thing is that when I was getting overwhelmed and told God that I could not take much more of this journey, the court date would be pushed back another month, and another month, and yet another month. God was telling me to be strong, to persevere, to be obedient, and to show His love. As the hours led to days, and the days led to weeks, and the weeks led to months, I persevered as I saw the path of my cross-bearing journey disappear into the distant horizon. I did not like looking at the long journey that was in front of me, so I simply focused on one step at a time.

The days that followed were still filled with disgust towards mankind. Somehow, I wanted to be a witness for God. I knew I could be a witness through my actions, but I also wanted to do more. Then, during one of my breaks at work, I focused and meditated on my palm sized crucifix necklace. I wore that necklace each day, but I always had it hidden under my shirt. As I sat there, in silent thought, I contemplated on the gift of courage, which is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was right then that I decided to wear it on display for all my customers to see.

*Medjugorje message of May 25, 2000 "Dear children! I rejoice with you and in this time of grace I call you to spiritual renewal. Pray, little children, that the Holy Spirit may come to dwell in you in fullness, so that you may be able to witness in joy to all those who are far from faith. **Epecially, little children, pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that in the spirit of love, every day and in each situation, you may be closer to your fellow-man; and that in wisdom and love you may overcome every difficulty.** I am with you and I intercede for each of you before Jesus. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>6</sup>

I was a little uneasy about doing that at first. It was not a simple and small little necklace. It is a large crucifix that attracted every eye that came in contact with it. I didn't want to turn people off, or make them think I was trying to display myself as a holy and pious person, trying to justify my holiness by wearing it. However, after some more

meditation, I realized that it would be a visual reminder for me, as well as for the customer, that God is in all of us. And it did seem to make a difference. Maybe it was because it reminded me to work more diligently at being charitable, which then rubbed off on the customer. All I know is that I started to see a change in the attitude of my interactions. It acted as a simple reminder that Christ is present, and is in each one of us. It wasn't a difference between night and day, but I had interactions in which the customer greeted me with kindness. It was the customer who told me to have a great day. It was the customer who offered to help load the groceries in the cart. This wasn't the case with everyone, but I did notice a difference. And so, we simply need a reminder. We need a reminder that God is in each one of us. This simple reminder should help each one of us gain a greater desire to show God's love by being a humble servant to one another. For if you show love to each other, you are showing it to Christ. Plus, if you love one another, then people will know that you belong to God.

There were many times when I wanted to hide the cross under my shirt. I didn't want people to think that I was trying to justify myself as being holy, simply because I was wearing this large religious article. However, through some of the conversations and interactions that were a result of my necklace, I knew I was to keep it on display. Plus, it kept reminding me to persevere and to be charitable to every person who went through my line. For if I were to display Christ on the outside, through the necklace, I must also be consistent in displaying Him on the inside, from where my actions came. And so I persevered in bearing the cross, as I symbolically continued in wearing the cross.

Through this form of witnessing, I had some wonderful encounters. They would usually start with the customer commenting on how beautiful my cross was. I would simply open the door to conversation by telling them that there was a beautiful story behind it. This was typically followed with the customer inquiring about the story. I would then tell them that I was going through some life changing struggles, and through my prayer life, God gave me a visual gift by turning the chain on my rosary to gold. I would place this rosary in their hand for them to look at. Through some of the people's physical reactions, I could tell that I had placed my rosary in the hand of someone who was an anti-rosary person. But when they heard my short personal testimony about the rosary, it made them ponder, which at times led to other positive, yet short discussions. Then I would show them the palm-sized crucifix, which is black and silver, that I always carried with me. I would tell them that out of a selfish thought, I told God that it would be neat if He turned that cross to gold. I then ended the story, as I informed them that in the following days, a stranger, who knew of me and knew of my struggles, gave me this golden cross to wear. I then held the black and silver crucifix next to the identical but golden crucifix that was hanging around my neck. In amazement, I would receive all kinds of wonderful follow up reactions. Some would tell me of their struggles, and would ask for my prayers. Others would hug me and tell me that they would pray for me, while some said a little prayer with me right there at the cash register. Those interactions were confirmations of God's presence in everyone.

*Medjugorje message of June 25, 1999 "Dear children! Today I thank you for living and witnessing my messages with your life. Little children, be strong and pray so that prayer may give you strength and joy. Only in this way will each of you be mine and I*

*will lead you on the way of salvation. **Little children, pray and with your life witness my presence here. May each day be a joyful witness for you of God's love. Thank you for having responded to my call.**"*<sup>7</sup>

That simple necklace, which wasn't so simple, due to its size, also instigated some quick discussions about faith. One that stuck in my mind was an encounter with a Baptist minister. I had made a nice comment to him about a hat that he was wearing, which had the words, "Jesus is our Savior." He was very kind to me as he followed up by commenting on the beauty of my crucifix. He then stated that he had a question that maybe I could answer. He told me that his faith does not have Jesus on the cross because we should worship a resurrected Jesus, not a crucified Jesus. Thus, he was wondering what the meaning was, behind having Jesus on the cross. From my heart, I simply told him that it was a constant reminder of the great love that Jesus displayed through his suffering that He went through, which led to His resurrection. It was a constant reminder of the great love He has for all of us. And therefore, when we go through struggles, we can offer up our sufferings to Christ, helping carry His cross, sharing in that love. I furthermore told him that I wanted to be consistent. I did not worship a baby Jesus, yet He is the most important figurine in the manger scene. Therefore, if I were to take Jesus off the cross, then I should also be consistent by taking him out of the manger scene. In a chuckled response, saying that he was enlightened by those ideas, he was still unclear as to why we would show off his suffering. As I looked to the next customer in line, expecting them to be impatient, I saw that it was a priest dressed in his priestly garments. Out of the entire time that I worked there, I never had a priest, dressed in his garments, go through my line. I just felt that God was working some magic, or maybe He was just playing a game of chess. Either way, I informed the minister that maybe the priest could clear up some of those questions. However, the Baptist minister informed me that he had to get going, and we both shook hands in peace. After that experience, I revisited with him, as he would go through my line during other visits to the store, at which we had some wonderful interactions.

***Medjugorje message of December 25, 2001 "Dear children! I call you today and encourage you to prayer for peace. Especially today I call you, carrying the newborn Jesus in my arms for you, to unite with Him through prayer and to become a sign to this peaceless world. Encourage each other, little children, to prayer and love. **May your faith be an encouragement to others to believe and to love more. I bless you all and call you to be closer to my heart and to the heart of little Jesus. Thank you for having responded to my call.**"***<sup>8</sup>

I did not realize that a simple thing, such as Jesus on the cross versus Jesus off the cross, was such an issue between Christian religions. After that discussion, my eyes were opened to some negative interactions I had by the simple display of my necklace. I started noticing people who looked at me with disgust, as their eyes shifted between my necklace and my eyes. I even had some customers make negative comments about my necklace.

One interaction in particular stuck in my mind, which was similar to the minister who questioned my necklace. There was one lady who was in my line, and when she sneezed, I said, "God bless you." Instead of her replying with a "thank you", she looked at me with glaring eyes, as her eyes traversed back and forth between my necklace and my eyes. When she got to the cash register, I greeted her with a warm, "Hello, how are you doing?" But she kept silent, and displayed an uptight aura. I then asked her if she found everything O.K., at which she responded with the continued silence. Thinking that she just didn't want any interaction, I kept to myself. As a little time progressed, she blurted out in a defensive manner, "Don't you know Jesus is no longer on the cross?" Taken aback, I quickly, and sad to say, sarcastically responded by saying, "I am aware of that, but thank you for your true concern." I then told her that the great suffering Jesus did for us was the ultimate act of love. Therefore, my cross was a daily reminder to carry my own cross with love, showing love to one another, even to those who would abuse my kindness." As I finished up the transaction, I told her to have a happy and peaceful day, at which I realized her closed mind did not hear any of my words as she stormed off with an uptight attitude. I simply thought to myself that the hardest thing to open is a closed mind, as she went to my supervisor to complain about me, and I was again coached for poor customer service.

Because my job was through a company in which customers had to have memberships in order to shop there, many of which were purchased through their place of work or some other affiliation, I was able to see the affiliation of many of these customers. Before I could ring up any of the customers' items, I had to scan their membership card. When I would scan their card, I was able to see their name, as well as their place of affiliation. As I found, through my interactions, I had received so much lack of love and offensive comments from people who claimed to be Christians, as their membership cards stated their place of business or membership affiliation as being from a Christian church.

This was hurtful to me, and it must be terribly hurtful to God. Should we go through life focusing on the differences between our Christian faiths, causing us to be evil in our actions? Shouldn't we instead be focusing on the similarities, which is to be like Christ in all that we do? As Christians, no matter what the denomination, we are called to love one another, for God loves each one of us children, no matter what our denomination, faith, or lack thereof. No matter what Christian denomination we belong to, we may think we know much, but we really know nothing as compared to what we one day will know, whether we want that knowledge or not. What we do know is to do good to all people, even, or should I say, especially to our enemies. We are not to mistreat anyone.

The Church is to be the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Those who divide it, through their words, actions or thoughts are offending God, which is called sin. Jesus founded the church on small beginnings. As it grew, divisions also grew. Those responsible for the divisions do not show love in those divisions. So instead of being quick to take another denomination to Scripture, backing up what you think you believe, be quicker to fall on your knees, humbly in prayer. Instead of adding to division, teach and display unity, love and faith. And through those negative interactions over my necklace, I did not experience much unity, love or true faith. I found it interesting to receive more open minds, filled with loving actions, coming from those who didn't even really have a religious affiliation. God doesn't want disunity. Instead, He wants us all to unite, under one body,

to follow His commandments, and to love one another. For if we love one another, the world will know we belong to Him.

With interactions like those, there were many days in which I felt like hiding my necklace under my shirt. However, when those strong feelings came, Jesus would send me people to reaffirm my form of witness. During a lot of those frustrating feelings of wanting to hide my cross, I had people strike up conversations, out of the blue, about Medjugorje and the apparitions of the Blessed Mother. One woman, with no other interacting words, simply started a conversation by stating that her son had just returned from Medjugorje. Another lady initiated a conversation by asking me if my necklace was from Medjugorje. And yet another lady struck up a conversation by stating that she has a rosary that turned gold, without any knowledge of my rosary whatsoever. When I would ask them what motivated them to talk about Medjugorje, they simply responded with, "I have no idea." It was through those interactions that made me realize that I needed to continue wearing the cross, for it was a form of witness that I could do through my daily interactions. It was those interactions that reaffirmed my knowledge that Jesus and the Blessed Mother are ever present. They are with us at every moment of our lives. And they are only inches from our face. All we have to do is seek them.

At that point in my journey, I realized God's will for me. I knew how I was able to be a witness for Him. I knew that I was to strive each day to be perfect, just as God in heaven is perfect. However, I feared that the rest of my life would involve this type of laboring, being a cashier or something equivalent. I wanted something more fulfilling, and was still hoping for God to reveal a wondrous plan to me. I didn't know if I was supposed to be doing certain tasks, researching different avenues of life, or to simply go with the flow of all that was happening. Most of the time, God's will is accomplished by simply, but faithfully, taking step after step. Usually, those steps are baby steps. As I've mentioned before, I realized that the first thing that needed to be done was the purging and cleansing of my soul. Part of that purging was to grow in the virtues. Waiting for the results of my immediate future led to a growth in patience. Attending my new job, which I did not enjoy, led to my growth in perseverance. My display of kindness and love towards all people I came in contact with as a cashier, led to my growth in charity. My working at a minimum wage job helped me grow in humility/humbleness. And my virtues of faith and hope were being put to use as I continued my unceasing prayer. After a typical day of spiritual struggle, I again asked God what I should be doing in order for His will to be accomplished. That evening He sent me a little confirmation.

When I got home from work, I started going through a large box filled with cards and letters I had received from students I had taught. The FBI had written in their report that I saved cards and letters from students, trying to portray me as a sick and demented person. However, as any new teacher who loves their job will attest to, we keep those letters and cards because they hold great memories of lives we have positively affected. Therefore, I wanted to give a lot of those letters to my attorney to use in the case. As I pulled the first handful out of the box, one of the letters slipped through the pile and fell to the floor. As I picked it up, I realized it was a letter from a friend with whom I used to teach. This friend, and fellow co-worker, was the one that was tragically murdered the previous year. As I read that letter, some of her words struck my heart, for through my daily prayers, I had been asking her to pray for me. I was not sure if she was praying for me, or was able to pray for me. As I read the letter, I just felt that she was answering that

question. The last sentence she wrote in this letter was, “Know that you have an awesome prayer warrior in me”. I felt a great comfort. Then, as I reread the letter, I noticed that she wrote a sentence telling me to always search for God’s will. Then she wrote a note telling me to read chapter twelve in Hebrews for strength. It was all about running the race of life, persevering in our daily struggles while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. It also talked about how God our Father disciplines us because He loves us. After reading this, I felt the connection between the scripture and my present struggles and tribulations. I knew that God simply wanted me to continue to grow in my relationship with Him through prayer, and to continue persevering in being Christian in all my actions, words, and thoughts, which is the will for all of us.

That evening, my parents and I went to a presentation given by an order of Catholic nuns. On our way to the presentation I told my parents of the experience I had with the letter, and I read chapter twelve in Hebrews to them, focusing on the part about running the race. When we arrived and listened to the presentation, it was as if God was reinforcing many of those thoughts. This nun focused her talk on growing in the purity of love in all that we do, even if they are tasks that we don’t enjoy doing. After her talk, there was a short break, in which I sat there, keeping to myself. Then, out of the blue, a gentleman came up to me and introduced himself. We got talking a little bit, and I found out that we had a lot in common. He started the conversation by telling me that he owned the same prayer book that I was holding in my hands. He told me that he traded a picture of Mary for the book. When he described the picture he traded, entitled “Mary, Mother of the Eucharist”, I told him that I owned that exact same picture, and have it framed on my wall at home. He then continued by telling me that he was writing a book, which was about persevering in times of struggle. He then told me that the title of his book was, “Running the Race”. I immediately said, “Hebrews, chapter twelve”. At which he responded, “Exactly.” So I told him that I just read that chapter to my parents on our drive to this presentation. We both agreed that God was confirming things for both of us.

Interactions such as those are called divine interventions. It is a powerful form of communication with God. Divine interventions can come in the form of human interactions, through something you see or hear, or through different experiences you come across. I felt this form of divine intervention was meant for both of us. It was as if God was giving him a confirmation on his book, and God was giving me a confirmation to continue to persevere, to continue in writing my own book, and that He would take care of everything. In this running of the race, we are all called to *“rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1-2)*. Little experiences like those were constant confirmations that God was present with me in my time of struggle.

I continued to run the race. As the school year came to an end, another tough part of the cross that I had to bear had arrived. Now that it was summer, and no one was in the school, I was allowed to clear out all my belongings from the classroom. When I arrived at the school, great sorrow began to fill my heart again. As I got out of the car, the principal I so respected and cared for was there to greet me. Seeing her face, receiving her compassionate hug, and sharing conversation with her made me feel like I was part of that community again. We went down to the classroom, and as I entered, great sadness pierced my heart. Thinking about the wonderful memories, imagining the eager learning faces of the children in the classroom, and reminiscing on the great times I had with the

faculty all came rushing to my mind. I immediately got busy packing up all my classroom belongings. As I packed up box after box, memories of all the wonderful activities and effort I put forth in my teaching flooded my mind. I just did not want to have to leave that part of my life behind. I did not want to be forced to throw that part of my life in the dumpster. So much love, so much effort, and so much of my soul was put forth in each lesson and activity. As I took load after load to the car, my tears were streaming. Not only that, but heaven began crying upon me as well.

It was a cloudy sky that evening, accompanied by intermittent rainstorms. It seemed as though every time I packed up a load out of the classroom and took it to the car, the sky started to rain on me. It was very strange. I made seven trips to the car. Each time I opened the door to step outside, I noticed that the cement was dry. However, as soon as I stepped out the door, it began raining large, warm raindrops. It wasn't a downpour, but an intermittent rain composed of very large drops. The drops, upon hitting the pavement, would make three-inch diameter spots on the ground. I would rush to the car, throw all the boxes in the car, and rush back to the school building, only to have the raindrops come to a halt upon entering the building. This happened every trip I took to load up the car. I would see a dry pavement, step outside, and it would start raining. I would run to the car, load it up, run back to the building, the rain would stop, and the pavement would dry up. I was crying, and I felt as though heaven was pouring its tears down as well. Once I had packed up all my belongings, I said a special blessing upon the classroom and school, and I departed. As I drove home, the sky just dumped its tears down in a heavy downpour. At that point, the rain was so intense that it was difficult driving, as my windshield wipers couldn't work fast enough, let alone the streets that started to flood. It seemed so symbolic of the sorrow that was in my soul.

As I packed up everything that was so much part of me, I again felt as though I was being stripped from everything that meant so much to me. One by one, it felt as though God was taking all the things that I valued most from me. I felt empty and vacant. Everything I so cared about seemed lost. It seemed as though everything I valued was being thrown into a burning fire, never to be seen again. In that anxiety and grief, I felt what Peter must have realized when he left his boats and nets to follow Jesus. I felt what Matthew must have realized when he left all the money he gained as a tax collector to follow Jesus. I felt what all the apostles must have realized, as they all dropped everything that was part of their lives, in order to follow Jesus. I realized that Jesus wanted to give me so many blessings, so many graces, so many of His riches. However, with my hands full of the things I had collected, I could not hold any of those graces. Therefore, God allowed me to be destroyed into a barren life with nothing in my hands, simply so He could pour His graces into them.

That day of packing up my items from the classroom, I was overcome with sadness, yet happiness was in my heart as well. I was able to interact with the principal, who I so cared about. I was able to feel like I was a teacher again, just for a couple hours, working in the classroom. Plus, I also had a faculty member contact me, inviting me to their house for dinner. So, after I finished packing, I went to their house for dinner and good conversation. Feeling as though nothing had changed, we ate together and had wonderful fellowship and interactions, just like old times. I was so fortunate to have such loving people care for me as they reached out their hand of friendship. And through my tribulation, I was made aware of my true friendships. Sometimes it takes tragedies for

you to see who those true friends are. True friendship is a difficult thing to find. Even when you think you may have found it, you may be surprised once a difficult tribulation comes your way.

I think the book of Sirach does an accurate job of explaining the different types of friendship, all of which I had experienced: *“One sort of friend is a friend when it suits him, but he will not be with you in time of distress. Another is a friend who becomes an enemy, and tells of the quarrel to your shame. Another is a friend, a boon companion, who will not be with you when sorrow comes. When things go well, he is your other self, and lords it over your servants; but if you are brought low, he turns against you and avoids meeting you. Keep away from your enemies; be on your guard with your friends. A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he who finds one finds a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price, no sum can balance his worth.”* (Sirach 6:8-15) Therefore, when you come across a true friend, who is like a treasure, make sure you take time to let them know how much you value their friendship.

That day of packing up all my belongings from the school was the final separation. As I went back to my new routine of being a cashier, I continued to carry the cross. I continued to see people I knew. Weary of where I stood with them, they were quick and short-lived interactions. However, they were still forms of reconciliation and healing. I was able to apologize to them. Some of those interactions were positive, while others were uncomfortable. Some were willing to hear my words, while others were upset and avoided any contact. In any case, God continued to bring those people to me, one at a time. And each day, I continued to grow in the different virtues, especially the virtue of humility. This was a virtue I had never really experienced, and now was experiencing on an exponential level. Because I never experienced humility on an extreme level, my actions throughout my life did not exist in a state of humbleness, but rather in a state of pride. As I further reflected on all that had happened to me, I wonder if it was my pride that truly led to all this tribulation. For God tells us, *“Pride is the reservoir of sin, a source which runs over with vice. Because of it, God sends unheard-of afflictions and brings men to utter ruin”* (Sirach 10:13).

As the months progressed, the court dates were arriving. The first court date was called the “Pretrial Motions”. In this hearing, my attorney would present to the judge reasons to throw out the case, and to drop all charges. After understanding the motions my attorney filed, I felt I had a very good chance that the judge would throw out the entire case. First of all, there was the fact that I cancelled the order, which the FBI knew, yet delivered, leading to my arrest. This was called “Entrapment by Estoppel”. Secondly, was the issue of the credibility and accuracy in the evaluation of the pictures, determining them to be child pornography. The only category the pictures could fall under was called a “lascivious display of the genitals”. However, several of the pictures that led to my arrest did not even show the genitalia region. Plus, the pictures they delivered to me were no different than pictures found in books in the library and bookstores, films at different video stores, or pictures in widely circulated advertisements and magazines. Finally, there was the fact that all the web sites I visited posted statements saying that they were legal in the United States. Furthermore, my attorney had other motions that he wanted to explain to the judge. I was hoping all of that would lead the judge to throw out the entire case. However, there was a good chance that he would leave it up to a jury to decide.

I was constantly informed that if my case went to jury trial, then I would be found guilty, period. It was hammered in my head that there would be no jury that would see a single male Catholic teacher, who ordered pictures of females, even if they were in swimsuits, and not find him guilty. Therefore, my hope seemed to be in the hands of the judge.

Upon investigating and researching all items the government seized from me, they realized that they did not find a “jackpot” of pictures. With all of the facts that my attorney was going to present, with no jackpot in the government’s hands, and with the pretrial motion rapidly approaching, the government offered me a plea bargain. My attorney informed me that it is rare for the government to offer a plea in cases like mine. Plus, the plea they offered was the best he had seen in cases dealing with child pornography charges. Now came the pressure of discernment.

The government said that if I would plea guilty to the crime of “Sexual Exploitation of Children”, then they would recommend sixteen months in prison, which my attorney explained could be lowered to six months in a halfway-house and six months of house arrest. The typical plea in cases like this, which is usually initiated by the defendant, is two years of mandatory prison. I was not sure what to do. I was pretty much guaranteed a huge decrease in sentencing. However, I could turn down their plea and fight it, possibly having the entire case thrown out. But then again, if I fought it, I could lose, and end up doing five years in prison. If I accepted their plea, I would have had to register as a sex offender, and I would never teach again, or be allowed to work around children. After serious prayer for discernment, I found no peace in accepting their plea bargain. Therefore, I turned it down. I wanted to see the results of the pretrial motions with the judge.

After turning down their plea, I informed them that I would be open to plea bargaining after the pretrial motions. However, they immediately came back with another plea bargain. They basically guaranteed no prison, no half way house, and no house arrest. They would guarantee straight probation if I would plea guilty to the original crime, which was “Sexual Exploitation of Children”. Again, my attorney informed me that this was the best plea he had ever seen. I thought about their offer, but the issue that weighed heavily on my mind was the fact that I would have to register as a sex offender. Plus, I would have the title of “Sexual Exploitation of Children” follow me for the rest of my life, which would prevent me from being hired by almost any company. Therefore, I had already made my decision when I turned down their first plea. Again, I turned down the government’s second plea bargain offer.

With my action of turning down their offer, my mind was focused on the hearing with the judge. However, just as quick as I turned it down, they came back with a third plea bargain. This was quite different from their first two offers. This time, they explained to my attorney that they agreed this case did not involve child pornography. However, they explained that they could not just drop the charges, but that I would have to plea guilty to a felony. Therefore, they offered a plea of “Obscenity”. They said that if I would plea guilty to downloading two obscene pictures of adults, they would drop the original charges and recommend two years probation. Now it was a very difficult decision. This was still considered a felony, and I could still face up to five years in prison. However, it was no longer a crime of “Sexual Exploitation of Children”, but rather a crime of “Adult Obscenity”. This was a crime that did not require sex offender

registration. I just did not know what to do. The prosecution needed my answer before the pretrial motion, which was right around the corner.

When I received this offer, I felt the government was running scared. I felt they realized that they did not have a good chance at winning the case. I felt as though they realized the errors they made. Plus, I truly felt I did not deserve man's punishment on something that was portrayed as legal. However, I knew that my possession of marijuana was illegal. Therefore, I counter offered with a plea of accepting guilt for the marijuana charge, if they would drop the other charges. But they immediately replied, commenting that I needed to accept guilt to some sort of felony. Through that comment, it didn't feel like justice. Rather, it felt as though the prosecution realized the mistakes they made, but needed to cover it up by making me guilty of some sort of felony.

If they would have simply dropped the case, they may have thought that they would have been held responsible for the aftermath of their mistakes of entrapment and of ruining a person's life. Thus, they needed me to plea guilty to some sort of felony so that they could justify their actions, pointing the problem toward the "convicted felon". After all, whom would the public believe; the government or a convicted felon? But if they simply dropped the case, then that question becomes more difficult to answer. Whom would the public believe? After discussion with my attorney and parents, whom helped me see the pros and the cons of both sides of the decision, I initially turned down their offer. I still wanted the judge to see our defense, which is what the prosecution seemed to fear.

After rejecting this third plea, the government replied by stating that there would be no more plea negotiations, now or later. There was an uncomfortable feeling in the air, as to the decision I made. There seemed to be a lack of comforting peace. And when we make decisions that are God's will for us, there will be a sense of peace. However, things seemed uneasy between me and my only contacts, which were my parents and my attorney. With this in mind, I reconsidered the plea negotiation. I realized that if I pled guilty to the crime they offered, then I would not be convicted with a sexual crime involving children. The government would recommend two years probation, resulting in no prison time. Plus, most of the uncertainty would come to a close. Another option, on the other hand, is if I fought it, there would be a chance that the entire case would be thrown out. However, there would also be the chance that I could be found guilty, spend several years in prison, having to register as a sex offender, and end up having a convicted title of 'Sexually Exploiting Children' on my record. In addition, if I decided to fight it, the battle could easily extend from a year up to several years. The attorney costs to fight it could start clicking off hundred thousand after hundred thousand dollars. With my parents being the ones who funded the attorney, all of that needed to come to an end.

I tried to weigh all the pros and cons the best I could. However, the main thing I wanted was for God's will to be accomplished, hoping that if He willed it, that I could be set free. I wasn't sure if my accepting the plea would be closing the door on allowing God to take control of the situation. However, I also wasn't sure if this plea was God opening doors for me. I was in fervent prayer asking God to open the doors that needed to be opened, and to close the doors that needed to be closed. I just wasn't sure if this was Him opening the door. I prayed for discernment. I wanted to make the correct decision, based on what God wanted to be done. I prayed and prayed, while beating my mind up over trying to make the decision. It was a heavy toll that weighed on my heart, mind and

spirit. As the prosecution needed my decision, I was at a point of throwing my arms in the air and telling God that I had no idea what to do. Again, I prayed for discernment, and I went to Mass. Wonderfully enough, God spoke to me through that particular Mass. The reading for the day, which, being Catholic, is the exact same reading said at any Catholic Church throughout the world, was an answer to my cry for help in discernment.

I've found that when I pray for discernment, and when coming to a decision, one of the best ways to achieve this is through Holy Scripture. The Scripture that was read at that Mass, from Matthew 12, was all about the times that we have obstacles, the size of mountains in our lives, and how we should present our plea to God. During that Mass, I just felt as if God was telling me, take this mountain in your life, and give it to me. I felt that He was telling me to accept the plea, and that He would take it from there. Therefore, with all that in mind, I accepted the government's plea offer.

After accepting the plea, I noticed a peace of mind with myself, with my parents, and with my attorney. When we make decisions, which are in accord with God's will, then there will be a sense of peace. It may not be a happy outcome, or an outcome that one may expect, but there will be a sense of peace. That doesn't mean that everything was hunky-dory. I had a lot of second thoughts. I wasn't sure if I had made the right decision. I felt that if God was going to intervene, then I had just closed the door which would allow Him to do so. However, there was a sense of peace, which was again, followed up by a little divine reinforcement.

The following day, after agreeing to accept the plea, was the monthly message to the world, from Mary at Medjugorje. As you know, from reading my story, I have related many similarities of my experiences to my patron saint, King David. I have continuously asked the saints to pray for me. And Mary's message, the day after accepting the plea offer, was a mini confirmation of my decision, as it stated:

***Medjugorje message of July 25, 2002: Dear children! Today I rejoice with your patron saint and call you to be open to God's will, so that in you and through you, faith may grow in the people you meet in your everyday life. Little children, pray until prayer becomes joy for you. Ask your holy protectors to help you grow in love towards God. Thank you for having responded to my call.<sup>9</sup>***

That was a simple confirmation to me. As I started pondering my decision, I realized that God had answered my prayers of having the charges dropped. Granted, they were not dropped in the way that I was hoping, for I wanted a perfectly clean slate. However, they were dropped, and there seemed a way out of all this tribulation. *"God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

The crime I agreed to plea guilty to was "downloading two obscene pictures of adults using the Internet". Once again, I did not even know that this was a crime, let alone a felony that could lead to five years imprisonment, all just a mouse-click away. Although I would have the title of "Convicted Felon" follow me for the rest of my life, there were still doors that could be opened. When I look at the flip side, and think about the possibility of being found guilty of the original charges, many of those doors would have been permanently closed.

Upon entering a plea of guilty to a felony, my cross bearing path had entered a new terrain. I started to experience some of the immediate consequences. My automobile insurance company quickly informed me that due to my plea of guilty to a felony, they were dropping my policy, due to a “bad character” issue. Furthermore, if I did not get continued auto insurance, then they would hand me over to authorities, which would result in a misdemeanor, which of course would break my bond requirements, causing me to be thrown back into prison. After contacting the insurance commissioner, I was informed that insurance companies are allowed to deny coverage to convicted felons for up to five years after their conviction. Furthermore, my group health insurance, which was through the school, was coming to a close, and because I had seen a psychologist, under the strong advice of my attorney, there were no individual health insurance companies that would take me. Therefore, the only insurance I could take was the high-risk, state issued health insurance, whose rates were ten times what I was paying. Those were just two quick consequences to a conviction of a felony. I also knew that my teaching certificates would be taken from me, leading to my career to be thrown in the dumpster. Plus, there was a long list of other jobs that I would not be able to apply for. I was now able to see why so many criminals were not able to make it in society, unless they had money. I could see how criminals feel that there is no justice, except for the fact that it is “just us”.

The next stage of the case involved a pre-sentencing investigator, who would research the entire case, give the information to the judge, who would then give the sentence. The judge could go along with the recommendations from the government, which in my case was two years probation, or he could set his own sentencing. Out of rarity, this investigator requested that we put together a portfolio with letters of character reference to give to the judge, to help him see the good side of me. My attorney then told me to get as many letters as possible, in as short of a time as possible. He wanted the letters in three days. As I thought about whom to get letters from, the only people that came to mind were all those people I was not allowed to contact, but was now told to contact in order to get those letters. I was still not allowed to explain any information about the case, but to simply ask for a letter of character reference. It was a tough decision, but I started calling many of the faculty with whom I taught, as well as the parents of students I taught.

I knew that it was very awkward, for I had made no contact, but now I was making contact seeking their help. I wasn't sure what kind of response I would get, but the response was overwhelmingly positive. Granted, just like life, you will always have the good, the bad and the ugly, so too were my experiences upon calling all these people. However, when the letters started to pour in, my heart was very touched. I felt like I was living the scene of one of my favorite movies, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. The last scene of the movie, when all the people of the town came to George’s rescue as they pitched their donations in the hat. All I needed now was to have the judge do to the charges what the bank examiner did to George’s debt, which was to rip it up. With all those wonderful letters, I prayed that the judge would drop all charges, which would be a miracle since I already pled guilty. The pre-sentencing investigator had eight weeks to collect all their information. The judge would then receive all that information and set a sentencing date.

Eight weeks passed and the pre-sentencing report came in. As you may recall, in the government’s plea agreement with me, they agreed not to refer to any child pornography

charges, and they would recommend two years probation as a sentence. However, when I read through the report, which would be given to the judge to help in his determination of the sentence, I realized that final report that was to be given to the judge was riddled with child pornography statements. There was only one sentence that related to the charge that I pled guilty to, which was the plea the government offered me. The rest of the report was loaded with statement after statement, referring to the charges of child pornography. Furthermore, their original agreement of two years probation was now a recommended three years imprisonment. Granted, the government office that wrote this report was not the same government office that offered me the plea bargains. The prosecution office that offered the plea informed us that they would get the issue resolved. The report did not get resolved, and was ready to be handed over to the judge.

Before I knew it, I had to make another big decision. Through the work of my attorney, the government gave me the option to withdraw from the plea bargain. Again, the big issue of discernment was upon me. The original charges were being brought back into the case through a cross-reference to what I pled guilty to. I had to weigh the pros and cons and decide what to do. If I stuck with the plea, the judge could say the pictures I ordered, yet cancelled, was of a female under 18 years old. This would lead to a possibility of three years in prison. However, it would still hold the title of “Obscenity”, meaning that I would not have to register as a sex offender. However, when applying for jobs, the employers would see that the cross-reference to child pornography did apply. It was a lot of technical attorney jargon. The plea was in the final report, but they had thrown in a cross reference to the original charge. I did not want to just sit back without the ability to fight the case. Therefore, there was a great interest in withdrawing from the plea and fighting the case. However, if I did that, I would have been back at square one. The amount of money and time would have increased drastically. If I fought it, there was the chance that I could be freed from all charges, but there was also the chance that I would be found guilty of the original charges with the original sentencing. I just was not comfortable with the cross reference they threw into the report. Again, all those issues were blasting my mind as I was in a mental melt-down as to what to do. I immediately turned to prayer, asking for discernment. I wasn't sure if this was God opening doors for me. I was also not sure if the new events in the plea bargain were something in which God could intervene for me. I just did not know what to do. I remembered the last time I tried to make this decision, and the mental and spiritual torment I put myself through.

I received all that information while I was at work. It was basically informed to me that I had to make a decision fairly rapidly. Before I received that information, I was looking forward to getting off from work to go to Mass, which was my highlight for each day. However, after getting off from work, I was not too excited to go to Mass. There was just too much on my mind. With a little additional motivation from my mother, I decided to go ahead and attend Mass. I picked up the missal, which is a booklet that gives the Mass readings said each day. As I thumbed through the pages to find the readings for the day, I said a little mental prayer to God. I told Him that I didn't want to try to figure out what He wanted me to do. I didn't want to try to figure out if all those new events that were taking place in the plea agreement were His form of intervening for me, in ways I just could not see at that time. I wasn't sure if the offer to withdraw my plea was God opening the door. I just didn't know what to do as I prayed for discernment. Again, in my experience, scripture was the best place to get my discernment.

As I looked up the readings for the day, to take my mind off of the attorney situation, and to get my mind on preparing to go to Mass, God intervened for me, and gave me a direct answer to my discernment. The reading for that day came from Luke 12:54-59. In that reading it stated, “*Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the constable, and the constable will throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.*” I immediately shared that with my mother, and we both laughed in a huge relief from the mental torment of what to do. Thus, I decided to stick with the plea.

I knew that the government was bringing all the original charges back into the picture, through a cross reference that I knew nothing about. However, I just had a peace that God was intervening for me. So I stuck with the plea agreement. That divine intervention with my calling to God for help with discernment also happened on the same day the monthly message at Medjugorje was given. Again, God gave me a little reassurance as to the decision I made, as the message for that month stated:

*Medjugorje message of October 25, 2002 “Dear children! Also today I call you to prayer. Little children, believe that by simple prayer, miracles can be worked. Through your prayer, you open your heart to God, and He works miracles in your life. By looking at the fruits, your heart fills with joy and gratitude to God for everything He does in your life and, through you, also to others. Pray and believe little children, **God gives you graces and you do not see them. Pray and you will see them. May your day be filled with prayer and thanksgiving for everything that God gives you. Thank you for having responded to my call.**<sup>10</sup>*

With my decision made, we headed onto the next step within the court system, which involved some more waiting. I went back to my daily routine of persevering, which was starting to get old. I was beyond being tired. I was exhausted. I felt like I was living a life of perpetual rejection. I was tired of going to work, only to receive a rejected and worthless treatment from customers. I was tired of running into people I knew, only to receive rejected interactions. I was tired of having nightmares in which I continued to receive rejection. I was tired and worn out. I was tired of the steps involved in the case. I was tired. I hadn’t had joy or laughter in my life for a long time. Then, about six months after all this had happened, I was at work, and I had made some comment that made the employees that I worked with burst out in laughter. It was a great feeling. It was great to hear laughter. It was great to see the smiles. It just lifted my soul. It reminded me of all the laughs I shared and enjoyed in the classroom and with all my old friends. This was one of the first times in a long time that I laughed. I actually felt guilty and ashamed to be laughing. I almost felt like I needed to hide my laughter, but at the same time I wanted to savor the moment. I had missed laughter. I had missed smiling. I had missed happiness.

I continued my new life in retail. As those initial months passed by, there was a part of me that started to build feelings of anger. I had an anger build toward some of the faculty and community. The avoidance, the jeering fingers and eyes, the words in letters

sent to me, and the gossip that reached my ears started to build those feelings of anger. Once again, the toughest of all those experiences was the avoidance from the people I once knew. I even began to think that this is how God felt toward me. I began questioning whether He loved me or not. I would regularly wonder if God was upset at me. I always remembered reading about how God takes care of those who are just, but I began wondering if I was considered unjust, in God's eyes. I think those feelings arose because I was experiencing negative interactions every day. From how I was raised, I knew God did not view me that way. I knew God loved me. But still, the questions of "why" kept flooding my mind. Why were those people that knew me, ignoring me? Why were they avoiding me? Why did those interactions or lack thereof, hurt worse than those that were outright mean? Why? After contemplating that question of why, many days and nights, the only reasoning I could come up with, as to why those interactions hurt the most, was because as humans, we define ourselves by the relationships that we have.

Before all this happened to me, I was defined as so and so's teacher. I was so and so's friend. I was so and so's co-worker. As I came across people I knew, only to be treated like a stranger, I began to question who I was. I felt as though I was someone who didn't exist. This led to a building of anger toward those people. This anger led to a sense of hatred. This hatred began building so much that I began planning in my mind the things I would say once I crossed paths with them. My hatred and anger was taking me on the verge of seeking revenge. I didn't want to have those feelings. I began getting angry at God for having those feelings enter my mind and soul. I didn't understand what was worse, my sins of lust by looking at pictures in the privacy of my home, or the hatred and anger I was gaining through my experiences. I never had that type of anger. I didn't know how it was able to build with such strength. But then, through prayer, I realized that anger is built because there is a lack of forgiveness. Through my negative interactions of people treating me like a sick and dangerous animal, I was not able to forgive. I tried praying for forgiveness. I wanted to forgive. I said to God that I forgive them, but I think it was simply lip service. I was more afraid of the part in the "Our Father" that stated, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us." I wanted God's forgiveness. Therefore, I claimed that I forgave those people who added to my hurts and pains. However, I didn't know how to forgive. I would pray for them, but I didn't see how it would help. Through those prayers, however, I was able to see how that anger arose. I was able to see in what ways I could head down a path of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a difficult task. Some people claim to forgive, but they hold the transgression over the sinner. I know in my personality, I am very merciful and forgiving when the offender apologizes and asks for forgiveness. I was taught, however, that we are to forgive even if the transgressor doesn't apologize. I had a hard time with that. Then I thought to myself that this was a double standard. If I die in a mortal sin, the gates of heaven are closed to me. However, if I go to confession, apologize for my sins and ask forgiveness, the gates are reopened. Needless to say, forgiveness towards those that I had built anger toward, was a difficult task.

I guess the first thing I had to do was pray for those I had anger toward, and for myself. This praying may have started as simple lip service, but it did lead to a new step in which I was led to recognize my own sins as easily as I was recognizing their sins. In this way, I realized that I was not perfect either. If I wanted forgiveness, I had to forgive. If I wanted mercy, I had to show mercy. I continued to pray for them. Those simple acts

allowed my feelings for revenge to backtrack to lesser forms of anger and resentment. Upon seeing those people that brought additional harm to my spirit, I didn't so much seek revenge as much as I simply decided to go into prayer for that person. Mary constantly says that through prayer, peace will be achieved. And so, through this prayer for them, I was awakened to the next step in forgiveness. Instead of looking at the bad that those people brought to my soul, I tried harder and harder to remember the good things they brought, or the good things they had within themselves. For that is exactly what I wanted from them. I didn't want to be looked upon as an animal. Rather, I wanted them to remember the good in me. Thus, this is what I needed to do to them. Then, when my paths crossed with those people, I was better able to remember the good, and forget the bad. I was on the path of forgiveness.

As I awaited the closure of all that was happening with the court system, I was getting frustrated with how long the process was taking. The sentencing date should have arrived. I was still waiting, waiting and waiting. I tried my best to "*continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:14). In that persevering as a cashier, I had an interesting experience. It was a typical workday. I'd put in my hours in at work, and usually took my breaks in my car. That particular day, I was praying a St. Michael the Archangel Novena, the patron saint of police officers. It was the final day of the novena. That novena was quite an intense group of prayers. I started it during my first break, continued during my lunch, and I finished it up during my last break. Upon going back to the cash register after my last break is when I had an incredible experience.

I flipped my checkout lane to open, and the people waiting in other lines came rushing to my line. The first customer in line was someone who set my stomach a churning. It was a police officer who was dressed up in their entire garb. As I rang up her items, she then informed me of the five carts, over by the exit doors, that were also hers, and she needed those rung up as well. No one in line knew that she had all those items to be rung up as well. My manager, upon realizing the thousands of dollars worth of groceries I still had to ring up for this officer, closed my lane down and took the customers in my line to another register.

The police officer gave me orders of how she wanted the items rung up, and how she wanted them stacked and boxed. She never said "please" or "thank you." She then left my register, got a hot dog and soda and sat down while she watched me. From previous interactions with her, I learned that the majority of her groceries were going to the inmates at the prison. As I rung up the items, I did my own sort of blessing on each item, that in some way God may help each prisoner who would receive the different items. Then out of the blue, a fellow cashier came over to help me. The first words that came out of her mouth was, "Your guardian angel is here to help you." She was referring to herself, in a joking manner. However, if she only knew the symbolism of it all. I had just finished my novena to St. Michael the Archangel, which also included several prayers to my own Guardian Angel.

After I finished with ringing up her order, I reopened my lane. The next person in line made a comment about my necklace. I returned the comment by telling the customer that I liked the medallion that he was wearing. I then asked him what the medallion was. To my shock, with a divine intervention, he told me that it was a medal of St. Michael the Archangel. Filled with exciting joy, I rang up the next two customers. Then, the third

customer, to wrap up this divine intervention, was a female I knew through a prayer group I was in, and through a parish where I would attend Mass. She had also been helping me through my struggles with her support, counsel and prayers. Her name was Mary. As she got up to my register, she pulled a little prayer card out of her pocket that she wanted to give me. It was a picture of a guardian angel, with a guardian protector prayer on the back. It was the most beautiful and majestic picture of an angel that I had remembered seeing. She didn't know what I had just experienced, but to both our wonders, she added to that divine intervention. I quickly shared with her what I had just experienced, and I asked her what she could make of it all. She responded by telling me that I should not question the meaning behind it, but to simply appreciate God's marvels and gifts that He was obviously giving me. It was simply a wonderful gift from God.

A couple months went by, and the sentencing date had finally arrived. The judge basically informed my attorney beforehand that I would not be going to jail. Therefore, my attorney did not have to prepare an extensive hearing. The days before the sentencing date seemed to move in slow motion. The night before the sentencing, I decided to go to bed early, but out of anticipation, I could not sleep. I simply laid in bed, while memories of my entire life flooded my mind. It was something that I never before experienced. I mean, I have had many times when memories would come to mind, but to put into words that particular experience, I just couldn't explain it.

My mind was jumping from memory to memory, as it covered my entire life. I would think about the fun times I had as a child, such as riding my bike. That memory jumped over to the riding of my bike when I was in college. I thought about the thousands of miles I put on my bike, and even the memories of trudging through many snowstorms to get to school. Then I remembered the enjoyable bike rides I experienced on the many mountain trails. This led my mind to reminisce on the many other wonderful memories I had experienced in the mountains, whether it was hiking, camping, or simply sitting in my hammock, watching the clouds float by. My memory of the many people I had experienced those wonderful activities with entered my mind. Then, my mind would reminisce on the other good times I had with those people. Oh, how my mind explored the many memories that night. One after another, I saw memory after memory of family events, the places I had lived, the achievements I had accomplished, all my schooling years, and my memories as a teacher. Even the smallest memory entered my mind that night.

Most every memory was a pleasant one. However, there were some memories that brought shame, embarrassment, and feelings of what a foolish person I was. The hours clicked away as I pondered so many memories. I gave God praise and thanksgiving for such a wonderful life with which He had blessed me. And again, the memories of family, friends, and events flooded my mind. It was so pleasant, but there was also a sorrow that made me want to go back to those times. I wanted to leave the suffering and go back to my childhood in the mountains. I wanted to go back to my college years, playing board games with my friends. I wanted to go back to the wonderful times I had in the mountains. I wanted to go back to the classroom. I wanted to go back to the many things with which God blessed me. And it was then that I realized that this present time was also full of blessings. Furthermore, I knew that the rest of my life would also be filled with wonderful times, which would also be engraved into my memory. As that enjoyable, but anticipating night came to a close, it was time to prepare for the sentencing hearing.

I knew I wasn't going to jail. With that in mind, I was simply hoping that everything would be dropped, or that the judge would give an even more reduced sentence. However, when I went to Mass before the hearing, the readings for the day made me realize that those hopes would not come true. In the reading it said, "*Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines*" (Hebrews 12:5-6). I knew in my heart that I had continued discipline to undergo, but I still hoped, for one last moment, that it would all be dropped.

The sentencing hearing was very quick, and just as the judge told my attorney, I was not sentenced to jail. The judge went along with the plea agreement that the government offered me, and nothing of the cross reference was brought in to play. The judge stated that this was not a case involving child pornography, and he accepted the plea of guilty to downloading two obscene pictures of adults. I was now officially a convicted felon. This felony of "Obscenity" carried a possibility of five years imprisonment. However, the judge went along with the plea, and I was given two years probation, which included many conditions.

After the sentencing, there was an immediate feeling of relief. I was not being convicted of child pornography, and I was not going to jail. God had answered my prayers, and as usual, He was present, always intervening. I praised God and thanked Him for all that He had done for me. However, at that moment, there was a sadness in me that buffered out my gratitude. All along, I was hoping for a miracle of having all charges dropped. That miracle did not come, and so there was a sorrow. This sorrow increased the following week when I met with my probation officer for the first time, to go over all the conditions that I was required to follow for the next two years.

I was assigned to a very nice, caring and helpful probation officer. He did not have the attitude of wanting to display his power over me, or a desire to degrade me, but rather he showed me that he was there to help me get back on track. I thanked God for this continued guidance in all that was occurring. Granted, I was relieved that I had a good probation officer, but as we went over the conditions, I became overwhelmed. I was to undergo regular psychological treatments. I was also to participate in a weekly sex treatment program, at which I would be given routine polygraph (lie detector) tests to make sure I was abiding by all policies. I was also to undergo a weekly substance abuse program. I was required to call in each day, to see whether I needed to go in for a drug test. If I simply missed one of those meetings, forgot to call in one day, or if I failed a polygraph test, that would be a violation of my probation, called a "PV" (Parole Violation), and I would be sent to jail.

As for my computer use, there were many things I was not able to do. The government would supervise my computer use with tracking devices and software. They would monitor my computer use, including any programs I used, words that were typed, the internet sites I visited, and any email correspondence. Any violation of the computer conditions would also be a violation of probation. That part of the probation did not bother me, for it all seemed logical. Furthermore, I knew I would not violate those conditions. The probation condition that did bother me dealt with being around children. I was not allowed to be around any child while unsupervised. This condition didn't make sense to me, since I wasn't convicted of child pornography. The difficult part to this condition was that my interaction with my family was being controlled.

If my sisters or brothers came to visit with their children, they could not stay the night, or I would have to find another place to stay. Furthermore, if I went to visit them, I could not stay at their house. Granted, the government was just trying to make sure that there would be no circumstances that would be questioned, but that was tough. Our family is very tight knit. There are many times that they come to visit, or I go and visit them. Yet through that condition, even my family interactions would be under conditions. Furthermore, if I were left alone with a niece or nephew, unsupervised, I would be violating my probation, which would be revealed in the regular polygraph tests, in which I would then be sent to prison for a timeframe.

After meeting with my probation officer, I was overwhelmed. The chapter in my journey of waiting to see the outcome had come to a close, but the new chapter had just begun. I knew I should have been praising God and thanking Him. I knew I had a lot for which I had to be thankful. However, I found myself taking an initial attitude of “who cares”. My hope of having everything dropped was not fulfilled. Thus, I lost a lot of hope, which led to a despairing attitude of “who really cares anymore”. My hope of returning to teaching was gone. Any hope that I may have had was no longer in my near sight. However, what was in my near sight was all the requirements I had to fulfill in my probation, let alone my continued job of being a cashier. I was tired of persevering in that drudgery. In my mind, *“I had been assigned months of misery” (Job 7:3)*. I began to feel as though I did not have the strength to endure, and that I was reaching my limit of patience and faith. The anguish due to the loss of my wishes overwhelmed me. That grief made me want to do nothing but sleep. Yet even in my sleep, visions in my dreams terrified me. I began to think that I was going to simply waste away, as I initially formed an attitude of “I don’t care”.

As I went back to work, I did not have any desire to persevere in showing kindness to a world full of rudeness. I didn’t care to go out of my way to be nice to those that I knew would abuse my kindness. That attitude then started to make me think about my original sins that got me into this situation. My sins and temptations of lust crept back into my mind. I simply felt that there was nothing I could do that would make me love my life. At that present moment, I despised my life, as I formed my attitude of “who cares anymore”. However, Jesus warns us that if an unclean spirit that has been cast out of our soul returns, only to find it *“swept clean and put in order. Then it will go and bring back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who will move in and dwell there” (Luke 11:25-26)*. I found that to be true, as the temptations of lust pounded my mind even more fervently.

Throughout the year from my arrest up to my conviction, I had a manipulative mentality of “I’ll prove it to you God”. I’ll prove to you that I can control myself with this vice of lust and carnal pleasures. I’ll prove it to You. Then You can set me free and give me a second chance. However, when the conviction came, and the “miracle” of a “second chance” at teaching never came about, my motivation of self-control diminished, as I gained the “who cares” attitude. I slowly, but surely, fell back into going on the hunt for pictures that could lead me to fantasizing. Granted, they were “innocent” pictures, or at least what the world would consider to be innocent. I would go to the bookstore and buy fashion magazines. No nudity, but plenty of immodest pictures that led me to fantasize and fall into fulfilling my carnal pleasures. I just didn’t care anymore. And that initial phase started to desensitize me. I was frustrated with the battle, but with my “who

cares attitude”, I would turn to God and say, “Why is this so bad? You made man, and man has these sexual feelings. What’s the big deal here?” And it was one night, at my adoration hour, in front of the blessed sacrament, which is His true presence, body and blood, soul and divinity, that I was kneeling, with eyes closed, and I had this type of conversation with God. Just hours before coming to this assigned adoration hour, I had just finished involving myself in the carnal pleasures of lust, fantasizing with the pictures from that fashion magazine. I knew the Church sees that sin as being mortal, but I couldn’t see the seriousness behind it. I began my holy hour with a few prayers, saying sorry to God for what I had done. I asked for His forgiveness, but I honestly told Him that I did not see how it was such a serious sin.

I just didn’t see what the big deal was. I liked the beauty of the female body, of which is His creation. So, I am just giving admiration and attraction to His creation. Upon making those justifications in my mind, I again asked God to show me how those actions hurt Him, or how it effects Him. Again, it was one of those “show me” prayers. After saying this short and somewhat half-hearted “show me” prayer, and after a good amount of silence, with no answer in my mind to this question, I opened my eyes, and laying there, right beside the kneeler I was using, not two feet from me, was what appeared to be a rubber snake. I immediately thought to myself, “What parent would allow their child to bring a rubber snake into the adoration chapel?” I decided to pick it up and take it out of the chapel room, but upon reaching out my hand to pick it up, I saw the tongue flicker. It wasn’t a rubber snake. It was a real snake.

I slowly moved away from the snake, not wanting to make any sudden movements. Not believing what I was seeing, I took a closer look. It was a long gray, white and black striped snake. Its tongue was flickering. Not knowing what to do, symbolism hit my mind. “What is Satan doing in this Holy of Holy places?” I wanted the snake out of there, but I didn’t know how to do it. How did it get in this room in the first place? This room was sealed tight. Plus, in order to get in from the outside, it had to go through two tightly sealed doors. Again, how in the heck did that snake get in there? I wasn’t about to try to transport the snake out of there, so my only other option was to kill it.

The snake was simply lying there. It wasn’t moving, other than the flickering of the tongue. However, symbolically thinking, I didn’t want to spill the blood of Satan in this Holy room that had the Precious Body and Blood of Christ. Would this be disrespectful and degrading? But then what came to mind was the Bible quote about crushing the head of the serpent. I then took the heavy chair that was closest to the snake, very slowly lifted the leg of the chair over its head, and quickly squashed the head of the serpent. It slithered and twisted as its head was pinned and crushed under the chair. I left the leg of the chair pressed on the flattened head as it continued to squirm around. I didn’t know how to remove it from the room, especially since it was still twisting and turning. I wasn’t about to pick it up.

Upon sitting there for a few minutes, pondering what to do, I had an inner voice tell me, “This is how your sin effects Me.” I had totally forgotten the prayer that I had just prayed, for all that was on my mind was getting that snake out of there. But then, it all made sense. What a wretched sinner I am. Because of my sins, I allowed Satan to have access to the presence of God. Just five minutes previously, upon first seeing the snake, I thought to myself, “What parent, in their right mind, would allow their child to bring a rubber snake into this room.” But now it made sense. I was that wretched person who

brought that snake in. I was in a state of serious sin, but couldn't see it. I then went to adoration, basically bringing Satan along with me. Who in their right mind would bring Satan along with them when they are going to go visit Jesus? Yet this is what I did. This is what we all do when we are in a state of serious sin, and we go to visit Jesus. And I can further see the seriousness of taking the Holy Eucharist in a state of serious sin. It would be like offering Jesus up as a sacrifice to Satan. Every word I prayed during that Holy Hour, Satan was present to listen to as well, which could help him in making things more difficult. Satan had no right to be in that room. The adoration room is a room where one should be able to go to get away from the presence of Satan and to be submerged by the presence of God. With those thoughts running through my head, I wanted to get that snake out of there.

The head was totally smashed, but the snake continued to twist for another good twenty minutes or so. I finally picked it up, threw it in the trash and took it out of the room. When I reentered the room, I just fell to the floor in sincere sorrow. I wanted to say a sincere and complete prayer of contrition, but the only thing that could come out was, "I am sorry Lord, I am sorry! I am so sorry!" And each time I said sorry, His presence filled my body in a feeling of goose-bumps without the actual physical appearance of having goose-bumps. Thinking to myself about what a wretched sinner and person I was for having brought Satan to God's presence, I wanted to leave, go to confession as soon as I could, which I would have to wait for since this adoration hour was at 2:00 am. I wanted to immediately go to Confession to crush the head of the serpent that I had allowed to enter into my soul, AGAIN. Upon driving home I said to myself, "The next time you, Jeff, think about entering into the carnal pleasure of lust, think about how it affects God, for He took the effort to show you. Take this gift He gave you and use it to recover from this addiction. There may be no obvious hurt or pain or victims, although those do exist, including yourself, but there is a lot of hurt to God, for you will be allowing Satan to have access to God's presence. Prevent that from happening, and be strong and pure. It will be the pure of heart that will see God.

I quickly recognized this poor attitude of "who cares" and refocused my train of thought. I knew that the Lord would heal my heart and bring His hope to reside there. I wanted the Lord to be pleased with me. I wanted to be like King David, "*a man after his own heart*" (1 Samuel 13:14). So I thought to myself about what it takes to please the Lord. Well, "*the Lord takes pleasure in the devout, those who await his faithful care*" (Psalm 147:11). Therefore, that is exactly what I would do.

It was at that time that I again realized the miracle that God had performed for me. Just as Jesus did, when He walked the earth, healing people of their sins, so too did He heal me of my sins. And His words to those He healed also struck my heart as He said, "*Look, you are well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may happen to you*" (John 5:14). In my heart, I knew what that worse thing would be if I fell back into my sinful way of living. That worse thing could end up being an eternal life without God. Therefore, I decided to "*return home and recount what God had done for me*" (Luke 8:39). And in my recounting of His greatness in my life, I realized that this journey ahead was going to be a pilgrimage of forming a new life. A life with my eyes focused on God, while forming a well balanced life.

## Chapter 10

### Return to a Well Balanced Life

Official convictions and sentencing was now brought upon me. All of a sudden, the media took on a new slant towards my case. Initially, the media covered my case, as I was portrayed as a monster. Now the media portrayed me as an “unheard of case”, because when all was said and done, I was convicted of downloading two obscene pictures of adult women on my computer. That was unheard of. The media, because they rely heavily upon the right to freedom of speech, felt this was being violated. Thus, my story took on a new path of news, in a turn-around effect. The media felt that my conviction of downloading obscene pictures of adult women was a violation of my first amendment rights. However, deep inside, I knew I was wrong. I knew I needed help. I knew all this was a result of a prayer that God wanted to answer, which was a prayer to retrieve me from my addiction to pornography.

Now that I was officially convicted and sentenced, this began a new process of healing and growth. Although I did not have to register as a sex offender, one of the requirements of my sentencing was to attend a weekly “sex offenders” program. Although this was a government run operation of recovery, the similarities between their procedures and God’s procedures to recovery were very similar. This was a road of being stripped and torn down. This was a road of spending time each day, reflecting on the day’s events (a form of prayer, so to speak). This was a daily path of being alert and able to determine risk factors that could lead to relapse, which was in the same sense, being aware of temptations when they arose. This was a road of setting up a lifestyle that would prevent temptations or risks from entering my day to day living. This was a road of learning how to respond when temptations did arise. This was a road almost identical to the spiritual road that God wants someone to travel, as they rid themselves of their vice, and begin growing in virtue.

***Medjugorje Message of October 25, 1992 "Dear children! I invite you to prayer now when Satan is strong and wishes to make as many souls as possible his own. Pray, dear children, and have more trust in me because I am here in order to help you and to guide you on a new path toward a new life. Therefore, dear little children, listen and live what I tell you because it is important for you when I shall not be with you any longer that you remember my words and all that I told you. **I call you to begin to change your life from the beginning and that you decide for conversion not with words but with your life.** Thank you for having responded to my call."***

This government program for sex offenders was a weekly class, which involved many steps to the road to recovery. Although my crime was not constituted as a “sex crime”, nor was I considered a “sex offender”, I was ordered by the court to attend this program. And so began my first class. Sitting down in the group, we were told to introduce ourselves. We were required to present the details of our crime, and about who we victimized. This was how each class, every week, began. Listening to the dozen other members in this class, I realized that I was surrounded by rapists and child molesters.

When it came time for my turn to share, I introduced myself, and explained that I was convicted of downloading pictures of adult women on my computer. Confused eyebrows raised, wondering why I was there for such a crime that they did not even know existed. However, the government leader of the group was quick to drill me, like a drill sergeant in boot camp. And that was their first goal, to tear me down into nothing. I thought that this was not really needed, because through all that had happened, since the day of the search warrant, I had already been torn down into nothing. However, the leader continued tearing down, so that they could start rebuilding.

Looking back at it, I guess it is symbolic of the first steps we need to take in our spiritual walk, to change our evil ways. We need to be torn down, so that we can see ourselves as nothing without God. And once that humility has taken form, then it would be time for rebuilding, gaining wisdom and insight on how to grow in virtue, to root out all vices, and to use that wisdom to live a better life. Although the government program for sex offender recovery was not spiritually based, there were many aspects of that program that were similar on how to live a spiritual life.

We were required, each day, to write a journal entry of the day. In doing so, we reflected on our actions, and what our thoughts and feelings were in dealing with issues throughout the day. Although the government would not want to hear these words, the fact of the matter is that this was a form of prayer, letting out your feelings and thoughts of the day, taking time to meditate and reflect on your own actions of the day. Through doing that, I was able to learn about cycles that would lead to the build up of temptation.

Another requirement that we were to do was to complete several workbooks, reading a chapter or more a week, and answering the questions at the end of each chapter. The books dealt with learning about ourselves, our actions, and what is considered to be good and bad. Again, this was a form of walking a spiritual life, for the many saints that led a holy life would regularly read holy writings, aiding them in their journey. In these writings, they would gain wisdom on how to lead a better life, a holier life, and a closer walk with God. This was the same effect happening in reading the guidance in those books. Much of the information presented was information you would find in the wisdom that God has given us through His Holy Word.

Yet another requirement was to come to weekly group to share the falls we may have incurred during the week, sharing with the group, things that led up to the fall, as well as our feelings and thoughts of entering into that fall. For example, there was one time in which I fell. I told the group that I had fallen weak to temptation and I bought a fashion magazine that was in the checkout aisle at the grocery store. Of course, what followed was discussion about what led up to that fall, and what I could have done to prevent that from happening, including breaking the cycle before it grew into full force. That whole process reminded me of going to confession. After sharing my fall, it was recommended to my probation officer, from the leader of the program, that I go to prison for two weeks for having a probation violation. Thanks to my probation officer's final decision, he thought it would be a better environment if I continued to stay at my parent's house instead of having a fear tactic of sending me to jail for two weeks.

Those two years of probation went by slowly. I continued to persevere in my job of retail. I continued to grow in my spiritual journey. And I continued to grow and have success in my weekly group meetings. During those two years of intense recovery treatment, I learned a lot about my past, the psychology behind it, and how I could use

that information to identify recurrences happening, so as to put a stop to it. Much of my thoughts on the spiritual life were reinforced, and I began to learn more and more about how to live a well balanced life.

At this point in your reading, I think it is important for me to inform you, the reader, that everything that I had written up until now, I wrote as I experienced it. Then, as I started probation life, I stopped writing my book. My daily writing was focused in my journaling for my sex offender's program. I also found myself writing in notebooks during my adoration hours. I would fill up notebook after notebook during those years. This is critical information for you, the reader, for the chapter to come. A couple decades have passed, and as I mentioned at the beginning of this book, I had a divine intervention this year, of 2021, telling me to pick up where I left off, and to finish my personal testimony. Thus, everything you are about to read was written two decades after my initial arrest.

After my probation was successfully completed, I was no longer required to be accountable to the government system. My accountability was now on my own. I had gone through three years of intense accountability, and had been free of pornography. I did not want to go back down that path, and I knew the temptations would still come. I decided to sign up for an accountability program. I did some research and found that the company, "Covenant Eyes", would be a great form of accountability. It was a computer program that kept track of all my computer activity, from internet searches to internet sites I visited. It kept track of my key strokes, and all my computer activity. It would then identify low risk, medium risk and high risk activities. In signing up for this accountability software, I had to have an accountability partner, of which I chose my father. He would receive weekly reports of my computer usage. However, if there was medium or high risk activity, it would send that information to him on the spot. He would then address me on it. If there were any questionable images, even in a side advertisement, it would send a blurred image of the picture to my father. This program also restricted access to obvious pornography sites. Now then, for the one entrenched in their own addiction, it is easy to have the thought process of, "I'll just uninstall the program off my computer when I find myself relapsing." However, with this program, the only way to uninstall the program, was through my accountability partner, my father. This program also had an "emergency" button. If I found myself starting to be tempted, in early stages, I could press this button and it would turn off all internet access... The only way to turn it back on was through my accountability partner. Furthermore, this company had an easy access to a live counselor who was a compassionate psychologist to help in almost any situation. I used this program for another five years after my probation was completed. This, as well as my spiritual journey of attending daily Mass, going to adoration hour once or twice a week, spending time in prayer, and spending time reading God's word, helped me recover from this addiction.

According to pornography statistics, 70% of men view pornography at least once a month. I am no longer amongst those 70%. Upon looking up those statistics, so that I could state that I am not part of those statistics, I came across a lot of other statistics that are very alarming. According to the latest statistics from Covenant Eyes, in 2021, there are 30,000 people viewing pornography every second. 1 out of every 5 mobile device searches are for pornography. In a world of hunger and poverty, it is sickening to see that \$3,000 is spent on pornography every second. Only 31% of young adults believe that

pornography is wrong. According to the latest statistics from Covenant Eyes, 1 out of 5 youth pastors **admit** that they are struggling with pornography as they view porn on a regular basis. It further states that 1 out of 7 senior pastors also **admit** to viewing pornography regularly.

In the past two decades, I have learned a lot about overcoming this evil. There is a spiritual battle happening that we cannot see with our human eyes. In my early journey of fighting this battle, and in some of my experiences I wrote about in this book, I have experienced this battle of spirits. There are evil spirits out there. They are there to tempt you. CS Lewis, in his book, "The Screwtape Letters", portrays this truth. In this book, there is a senior demon, named Screwtape, who is giving direction to his nephew, Wormwood, who is in charge of guiding a man, named "The Patient", into temptation, and toward his father below, the devil. In my experiences of being addicted, of being pulled from the addiction, in turning my life around, and in fighting the good fight, I learned that when I fell into a sin, such as viewing pornography, I was allowing a demon to be attached to me, personally. I have experienced this demon leave me through confession. This is not just with the sin of pornography, but pretty much all sin. In my experiences, when these demons were attached to me, my life did not go right. This is where some people may jump in and call it, "karma". Call it what you may, but in all I have experienced, it is a demon being brought into your home, the home of your soul. In my years of this battle, I have come to conclude that I do not want this to happen anymore. And with the specific evil of pornography, there is one way to fight it, which is to flee from it. If the temptation or desire arises, flee from it as if you were face to face with a cobra snake. Do not stand around, otherwise you will find yourself sitting in acceptance and finally being bit by the cobra snake as you walk the way of the sinner. And so, Psalm 1:1 comes alive when battling the evil of pornography. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." Flee from it. Do not look back. Physically get up and flee. Get out of there, as if physically removing yourself from a wasp that is swarming around your head. Flee.

Once my probation was done, I decided to leave Kansas and move back to my stomping ground of Colorado. I requested a job transfer, and before the week ended I was asked to come and work at one of the stores in Colorado. I was not only excited because it was the same city where my eldest sister lived, but I was also excited as it would no longer be a job role as a cashier. I would be working the following years in the audit, claims and receiving departments. I felt like there were initial steps of renewal happening. I actually vowed to myself that I would never enter into Kansas again, or even allow the plane I was in to go over the state. Granted, I had a lot of anger toward what happened to me, but I also had a great feeling of thanksgiving. I had been freed from that evil in my life. I had been shown my sins through God's eyes. I was rescued, guided and helped through it all. As I write this, two decades later, the truth is that if I came across my probation officer, or if I came across the lady in charge of the sex offender program, I would probably go up to them and give them a big hug of thanksgiving. I am so grateful to God, who loves me so much, that he picked me out, individually, to rescue me from this evil. And in staying true to Him, side by side, He began to restore my life in ways I wouldn't have even dreamed up on my own. As I packed up the Uhaul and headed

toward Colorado, He who was seated on the throne said, "*Behold, I am making all things new.*" (Rev 21:5)

## **Chapter 11**

### **I Make All Things New**

In my job transfer, I had to find a place to live. Being that I had to be there the following week, I did not have time to go out to Colorado, physically, to see the apartments. I looked them up on the internet and started applying for places to rent. I quickly realized that a Federal Felony would prevent me from renting at the majority of apartment complexes. I sought help from one of the complexes that denied my application, and they referred me to three different complexes that did not do a background check. One of them was an apartment complex that had the same name as my close friend whom I mentioned in my testimony, that was brutally murdered. During my trials, I would often go to her grave, which happened to be at one of the churches where I attended daily Mass. I would sit on the grass next to her headstone and have a conversation with her. I had often sought her intercession throughout the previous three years. One of the only apartment complexes that would allow me to rent had the same name as hers. I felt it was some sort of divine intervention, and so I got signed up to be a renter there.

The day came for me to move. My parents followed me in the Uhaul as I moved my belongings to Colorado. It was a beautiful sunny day, dark blue sky with white puffy clouds. As I drove the final miles to the apartment complex that I would call home for the next couple of years, I had an overwhelming joy from the Holy Spirit fill me. I drove over the final hill only to see one of the most beautiful views of the snow-capped mountains, as I pulled into the apartment complex. I checked in with the apartment office, moved in my belongings, and took a huge breath of happiness. I sat on the front porch looking at the mountains, only to realize that a Catholic Church was 100 feet from my front door.

When I moved all my items into my apartment, I ended up sifting through everything that dealt with my teaching career, and put all of it in the bedroom. Everything else I put in the family room and kitchen. I then decided to immediately head to the store where I was transferring to, so that I could introduce myself to the team members. When I arrived, they were having a morning meeting with most of the associates, so I was able to meet many of them, on the spot. It was a very nice experience. I then headed back to my apartment to get organized. When I arrived, it was like a twilight zone. There was a waterfall all over my front door. I immediately opened the door to see my ceiling pouring water and crumbling away. I ran to the front desk of the complex, and in a panic I notified the person in charge, who ran to the unit above mine. The water heater in the unit above mine had cracked, resulting in the flooding of my new apartment. The flooding was concentrated in the bedroom area. Everything I had in the bedroom, which was everything that dealt with my teaching career, was completely ruined. It was now trash. I had held on to a bit of very meaningful educational supplies and belongings. All of it was now completely ruined. There was nothing that was salvageable. It was trash. It was as if a voice said, "You don't need any of this anymore. You will never be back in the classroom again", which I also learned shortly afterwards when I tried to reapply for a teaching license. One could get a felony expunged off of their record, but a federal felony could never get expunged. The only way to have it removed was through a presidential pardon.

After cleaning up the flooded mess and getting settled in, I had a comforting peace of my new life on my own. After two years of living on my own, I was blessed to have my parents move into a home, 20 minutes away. During those first two years of living on my own, I persevered in my new job position, continued my daily Mass, and adoration prayer time. My prayer life was different now. It wasn't so much for the reason of hoping for all charges to be dropped, but it was now out of a love for our Father in heaven. When I was first arrested, I turned to Mary. Mary brought me to her Son, whom I got to know in a personal relationship. Throughout the last couple of years Jesus took me to the Father, who I knew nothing of, and I came to love Father God above all.

Living on my own was a good test of all that I had learned in overcoming the addiction to pornography. I passed the test. Life was good, but the biggest triggers I found were my feeling of loneliness. I have always wanted that special someone in my life. In my last year of college, I thought I had found that special someone. We dated for a while, and God was important in both of our lives. However, I was Catholic and she was Protestant. Many times she would put down the Catholic faith, and I wouldn't say too much. Nearing the end of our final year of college, Easter time came. She invited me to her church to celebrate Easter. I also invited her to my church, but she didn't want to step foot inside a Catholic Church. I decided to go with her to her church on Easter Morning. This was the first Easter in which I did not go to a Catholic Mass. I had put this girl as a higher priority than God. It was like an "Abraham Test", so to speak. Abraham put God first, even to the point of willing to sacrifice his son. Abraham had passed the test, but I did not. I put this girl in higher priority than my faith. The school year came to a close, and she ended up breaking it off with me, as she was still heartbroken from her previous boyfriend, who dumped her. She couldn't recover from that and was still stuck on always thinking about him. In my time of dating her, we never kissed or even held hands. I was attracted to her mostly because she wanted to hang out with me, as a "girlfriend".

I give all this information because in the year to come, I would again have that Abraham test. I continued with my work and prayer life, and spending some free time in the mountains. Being that I was in my middle thirties, I was starting to give up on the option of having that special someone in my life. Then out of the blue, I met this girl through a Christian website. We communicated back and forth, learning all about each other. A lot of our communication was talking about our faith. It was a relationship that was built on emails that we sent to each other. Hundreds of them. I came to learn that she had been raised Catholic, but had ended up practicing the non-denominational life for many years. As the months clicked away, and the emails turned into regular video chats, in which we got to know each other even more, it was time for me to make a decision to meet in person. I had fallen deeply in love with her. However, I struggled with what I should do. I didn't want to continue in this relationship if we couldn't share the core beliefs of our faith together. The Eucharist, the Sacraments, the teachings of the Catholic Church. I prayed a nine day novena, asking St. Anne, the patron saint of finding a spouse, to pray for my discernment. I actually shed tears in heartache, knowing what I wanted to do, but knowing what I should do. I would put God first. If we could not share these core beliefs together, as husband and wife, I didn't want to proceed with the relationship. On the final day of this novena, I reached out to God, in a deep heartache, for some sign on what to do. That day was my day off from work. I went to Mass, finished my novena

prayer and then headed out for a couple errands. I first went to the bank to deposit my paycheck. When I was standing in line and it was my turn, I went to the next available teller. However, when I arrived at her counter, she told me that she had to go to the restroom and said, "That teller over there would be happy to help you when she is done with her customer," as she pointed to the other teller who was busy." When that teller finished with her customer, I went up to her and she said, "Hello, my name is Emily. Sorry for the confusion. I will be happy to take care of you." Her name was the exact same name as this girl I had fallen in love with, Emily. And her words couldn't have touched me more. "I am sorry for the confusion." I had been so confused on what to do.

I almost forgot why I was in line. But after depositing my paycheck, I got into the car and drove to get a haircut. I had a smile on my face, but wondered, "God, are you trying to tell me that this is the one?" When I arrived at my walk-in barber-shop (this is when I still had hair), I pulled up in the parking lot to see a mother taking three of her boys in for a haircut. I tried to quickly jump out of my car to beat them inside so that I wouldn't have to wait for all three of them to get their haircut. I was not able to beat them inside. Not only were there now three customers in front of me, but it was also lunch break for the stylists. There was only one stylist working, as she told me that the other stylists were on lunch break. I had about an hour wait before the only stylist on the clock was able to finish all three of those boys' haircuts. It was finally my turn, but when I was ready to be called, the stylist told me that she was heading to lunch break, but the next stylist was just taking off her jacket in the back and would be out shortly. I waited a couple more minutes only to be greeted by the stylist who said, "Hello, my name is Emily. Let's get you taken care of." She was the one who cut my hair. I almost chuckled out loud at this. God was telling me in my heart, "You have had to wait quite some time in your life, but now Emily is here for you, ready to take care of you."

After my haircut, I was in a peppy and excited mood, as if my novena prayer was being answered. I decided to treat myself to some takeout, and decided to go to Schlotzkys for lunch. I hadn't been there for years. The last time I visited that restaurant chain was the night I prayed to God, asking him to show me my sins through his eyes. And so I decided to treat myself to one of their delicious sandwiches. I went inside to order, and when I got to the counter, the server who took my order had a name tag that stuck out like a bright light for my eyes to see, "Emily". Wow... What's the chance? I was now for sure that God was talking to me. I got in my car to head back to my apartment, and turned on the radio station. I normally have it tuned into a Christian Radio station, but decided to randomly change it. When I did so, on popped to the radio station, the song by Simon and Garfunkel, "For Emily, Whenever I May Find Her." I've always liked Simon and Garfunkel, and I know their songs pretty well. This is one of those rare songs that you have to know the title to, which I did. This song took on a new dimension as I listened to the words. "I wandered empty streets. I heard cathedral bells." Seriously? I had wandered empty streets in my life for years. But now, cathedral bells? Wow! When the song was done, it went to commercial. I flipped back to my regular Christian radio station only to catch the middle of Michael W. Smith's song, "Emily", as I cut into the song right when the lyrics sang out, "You're an angel waiting for wings, Emily". I knew for sure this was God telling me, "Jeff, I am making all things new. The very instrument of the computer that destroyed you, I am using to restore you; as this is how the two of you met and got to know each other. I am making all things new."

I knew she was the one I wanted to be with. We continued our relationship, and talked a lot about the faith, as she soon found herself coming back to the Catholic faith. It seemed as though she was taught so many incorrect things about the faith. All of a sudden, my slow-motion feeling of life that I had experienced for so long, was now clicking the months away. I was now on a plane, with ring in hand, ready to propose to the one that God had brought into my life. After a couple days of being with her and her family, Emily and I went to Sunday Mass. After Mass, I pulled out the engagement ring, which I had held in a jeweled egg that hinged open. I got on my knee, took her hand in mine, showed her the egg, and let her know that God was making all things new for me. I let her know that God has brought her into my life. I showed her the egg, and how an egg symbolized new life, I wanted to start my new life with her, as my spouse. I opened the egg to show her the ring as I asked her to marry me. She said “yes, let’s be together for the rest of our lives.”

The church we got married in was St. James, built in 1871. It has two spires, and looks identical to the St. James church in Medjugorje. St. James is also the name of the church where I first began partaking in my adoration hour in Kansas. We had the most beautiful Catholic wedding. The church had permanent open doors and windows, and there were about a hundred birds inside, as they made their nests in the arches of the cathedral ceiling. Other animals would come inside the church, out of the heat, and simply lay in the aisles of the church. In Emily’s heritage tradition, I presented Emily with the Arras Coins. Thirteen coins, blessed by the priest. After the blessing, I gave Emily the 13 coins to signify my willingness to support her and trust in her. Emily then accepted them signifying her willingness to trust in me. Each coin had the following thirteen inscriptions, “PEACE, COMMITMENT, TRUST, RESPECT, JOY, HAPPINESS, NURTURING, CARING, HARMONY, WHOLENESS, PROSPERITY, COOPERATION AND LOVE.” As I took them from my hand, and put them in hers, the priest took both of our hands, cupped his hands over ours, and said a blessing. After that, there was a cord and a veil wrapped around us, making us one, as another blessing was said.

One of the most memorable moments for me was during the consecration of our rings. During the exchange of our vows, as we placed our wedding rings on each other’s fingers, the priest took our hands, with rings on, and clenched them together, to ensure that the rings touched as he poured a large amount of holy water and Chrism oil over our hands, clenched tightly together. After this part of the ceremony was finished, we entered the celebration of the Eucharist. I know you think your own wedding is the most beautiful, but mine truly was. I had the total spiritual knowledge and feeling that the three of us, Emily, God and myself were all being united as one. We were married on May 19, 2007. God continued to make all things new for me.

After our wedding, we decided that we would live where I was currently living. When Emily made it to Colorado, we were on the search for a new house. My hourly income was not an impressive income so as to get an incredible house. We looked around and looked around. We ended up deciding on putting a bid on a town home, asking about \$5,000 less than what they were asking. It wasn’t in the greatest part of town, but it seemed like the best that we had looked at, with what we could afford. After making the offer, they didn’t even counter offer. They just outright turned down our offer. The next day, our realtor informed us of a house he wanted to show us. It was in the best school

district, in a mature neighborhood, with tons of trees everywhere, and right out the front door was a nature trail that went for miles. However, when we got to the house and walked in, we could barely handle the stench. It was horrific. It was a nice house layout, but everything was just demolished. The yard was nothing but waist high weeds and mounds of dog poop and trash everywhere. The fence was horrible, and consisted of half rotten wood and the other half was chain link fence. The carpets were dog urine stench, and were still moist from the mold the urine had created. It was a bank repossessed home, of which had been on the market for some time. I personally didn't want to make any offer. It was horrible. However, Emily had a vision, and she said that with my talents, we could fix it up from floor to ceiling. We went ahead and did a major low-ball offer, expecting either an all out rejection of our offer, or there would be a counter offer. We also said that they needed to throw in a new furnace. They didn't even come back with a counter offer. They accepted our offer on the spot. They wanted to get rid of the house.

We were excited, but a bit scared. Upon the inspection of the house, the bank inspector decided they would not give us a loan, as they said the house was unlivable. Our realtor never experienced anything like that. We asked for 30 days, to fix it up and have a new inspection done. They agreed. Every day for those 30 days, Emily and I woke up at 4am, the time for me to go to work. I would drop her off at the house, to work on it while I went to work. When I got off from work, at 12:30, I headed straight to the house, which happened to be 2 miles from my work. We continued working on the house until wee hours into the night, and then we would turn around and do it all over again. We ripped out the carpet. We disinfected the whole house, every wall, every section of the floor, every nook and cranny. We then kilzed the whole house, from floor to ceiling. We installed new closet doors, new interior doors, and molding. We ripped up the three layers of linoleum flooring that was in the kitchen and bathroom, and replaced it with tile. We removed the toilets, disinfected them from head to toe, and remounted them with new hardware. We painted the whole interior of the house. We installed new appliances. We hired out the jobs to install the carpet and clean out the air ducts. We bought all new shades and blinds, customizing them, with my sewing machine skills, to fit all our windows. After 4 weeks of non-stop work, we were ready for the re-inspection. When the inspector came in, his jaw hit the floor. We had turned this house into our home. We were ready to move in. Ironically, the town home we initially gave an offer on, was now trying to sell for \$5,000 less than what we offered. I continued to see God making all things new in my life. He didn't want us in that townhouse. He wanted us in this specific house that we just made into our home of many years to come.

A couple months after moving in, we were blessed with God's gift of new life. We were pregnant. On August 2nd, 2009, we gave birth to our first born, a precious little girl. As any parent knows, when that first child came out of the womb, life for us, the parents, completely changed. Our home was filled with so much love, joy and happiness. We spent the next couple of years doting on our only child. We then decided it would be a good time to try for pregnancy again, so that our little girl could have a sibling to grow up with, and have throughout life. Things were successful, and in 2011, we were pregnant with another little girl. During that pregnancy, I decided that I needed to get in better shape, to keep up with little ones that would grow into some very active children. I began taking afternoon jogs.

I hadn't done cardio exercise in a long time. My job was filled with physical labor, and my muscles were toned, but my cardio fitness was lacking. When I took my first run, I couldn't make it 100 yards before having to walk to catch my breath. After catching my breath I would run some more, only to be completely winded and light headed at about 100 yards of slow jogging. My wife told me to keep it up, and it would get better. I continued this workout each day, but each day was a struggle. There was one time when I pushed myself a little more than 100 yards, and I couldn't catch my breath. I was down on one knee. I saw an ambulance going by. I was very close to trying to flag the ambulance down. Instead of things getting better, it almost felt like they were getting worse.

I then decided that I should see a doctor. I really hadn't visited the doctor's office at all during my single life, and very rarely during my early years in our marriage. When I went to the doctor's, he spent a bit of time listening to my heart. He then advised that I see a cardiologist. Upon making the appointment with the cardiologist, I was not ready for what was to come. After listening to my heart and running some exams on me, the Cardiologist told me that I had about a month or two to live. I was born with a heart valve that was only two flaps, called a bicuspid. It was like a circle cut in half, with two flaps that opened and closed. I was supposed to have three flaps, a tricuspid, like a circle cut in thirds, with three flaps that would open and close. My body was wanting that third flap, so it was laying down scar tissue to create it, but in doing so it was actually sealing my valve shut. The valve opening should have been 2.5 cm in diameter, but mine was less than 0.5 cm open. Because of this built up backpressure behind the valve, my aortic arch was blowing up like a balloon. I would imagine most people would have broken down in tears, and maybe fear. With everything that I had already experienced in life, I was able to take the news, and immediately knew God was going to take care of me.

My father accompanied me to the appointments that led up to the surgery that occurred a few weeks later. I remember the last appointment, with the actual surgeon. My father and I were in the waiting room, and most people would have thought that we were there for my father, when actually we were there for me. Waiting to be called, I looked around the room, and there was the most beautiful framed picture of Jesus, standing right next to a heart surgeon, holding and guiding his hand during a surgery. It was very beautiful, and at that moment I was at great peace.

The surgery was successful, and I had eight weeks away from work to recover. It was during this time that I came across all my notebooks that had become my journals for holy hour. When I was first arrested in 2002, my mother introduced me to adoration. I knew about it, but didn't know much of it. In the Catholic faith, we believe Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist. Not just symbolically present, but truly present, body, blood, soul and divinity. During adoration, the priest takes a consecrated round host, and places it in a beautiful monstrance, that holds the body in the Eucharist. This holy of hosts is then on display for adoration, in which we truly believe we are in Jesus' full physical presence. When I first signed up for adoration, it was at a church that was about a 30 minute drive from where I was living. The name of the church was St. James. They had perpetual adoration, which meant someone was signed up for a specific hour of the week, and there would always be someone there, in adoration to Jesus, every hour of every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. They were in need of someone to fill a 3am shift on Fridays. I decided to take that shift.

For the remaining years that I was in Kansas, I went to this Holy Hour. It first started in a very small, one room chapel. It was the size of a family room. It was a very intimate time of prayer for me. Some days I sat, staring at Jesus in the host, talking to Him, one on one, in prayer. Other times, I just sat in silence as I listened to the thoughts in my head. Many times I read through scripture. There were even times when I brought my guitar and sang songs of worship before God. I was the only one there. It was a tremendous amount of spiritual growth for me, in getting to know God as my Lord and Savior, and as my God and my Friend. It was a time of being brought to Father God, and falling in love and in adoration to Him. I would wake up at 2:20 in the morning to head to my Holy Hour. I would return home at about 4:30am, only to get a little more sleep before work began. I thought I would be exhausted, but believe it or not, I would be fully alive and full of energy that day. I enjoyed my holy hour so much that when the church that I officially belonged to opened up their perpetual adoration chapel, I signed up for a 2:00am time slot as well.

During those two holy hours, I found myself writing in notebooks. Many times, I would read scripture, and end up copying different quotes that were powerful to me. I often found myself simply writing in those notebooks, as a form of verbal prayer. Other times I would write down the thoughts going through my head. Those notebooks filled up, one after another. I would simply set aside the one that was filled up, cover to cover, and I would start a new notebook. During my time in Kansas, I continued this. I ended up filling several notebooks of which I had forgotten about.

When I transferred out to Colorado, I still attended my daily mass as part of my prayer life, but I had a hard time finding adoration times. There was a church here and there that would have a specific day of adoration, during specific time slots, but that was it. I would go to some of those adoration times, but my writing came to a halt, and I forgot about those notebooks. Several years passed, and the church I started attending when I first moved back to Colorado started up as the first church in the city that would have perpetual adoration. I quickly signed up for a time slot and have enjoyed that holy hour ever since.

I bring all this up because during the recovery of my heart surgery, I came across those notebooks. I started reading through them, and my spiritual soul was opened up. The words in those notebooks just didn't feel like my words. The words written in those notebooks hit home for me. I remember that during my initial struggles after being arrested, I turned to Mama Mary in the rosary. I ended up consecrating myself to Mary and Jesus on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. I remember that there were a set of scriptural rosary booklets that were very powerful for me. It was then, during the recovery of my heart surgery that I decided to write a book that had 33 days of rosary meditations, based so much on what was in those notebooks. I wanted 33 days of meditations, for each year that Jesus was on earth. Everything just fit into place, and by the end of my eight week recovery, I had published "33 Days of Rosary Meditations." After receiving the Bishop's imprimatur, it was ready for distributing.

Because of the pregnancy of our second child, we found out about my heart problem, and I was able to get that healed. Our second little girl was born, and our house was bustling with more happiness and joy. My wife and I worked very well as a team in being new parents to two sweet little girls. When our second child was 18 months old, we were surprised to find out that we were pregnant again. We were doing a half-hearted Natural

Family Practice, not really planning on that third pregnancy. We were quite excited to find out that it was going to be a boy. Our family and our home felt like it was going to be complete. Before the birth of our first baby boy, we did a family month long trip to Emily's home, to spend time with her side of the family. It was the most beautiful vacation. So often, when one is away from home, they are regularly thinking about home. That has never been the case when going to Emily's stomping grounds. It is truly a home away from home.

After returning from that month long visit, just a couple months before the birth of our first baby boy, I had a tooth that was giving me problems. It had decayed a bit too much, and I needed my first root canal. After it was done, my dentist attempted to put the cap on, but when he did so, there ended up being a bad food trap below the surface of the gum. I went back to him, as it was a serious food trap that floss couldn't get to. This dentist attempted another four visits at trying to fix the food trap, but to no success. A few nights later, as I was laying in bed, I had a horrible bout of night sweats, followed by extreme cold chills. My senses were all off. I remember brushing my teeth, and when the bristles of my toothbrush accidentally rubbed up against the faucet, when I was rinsing the toothbrush, the bristles sprayed water in my face, and it felt like hundreds of little needles were pelting my face. I went to my doctor the following day who immediately sent me to my heart doctor, who did an immediate test on me. When the examiner got up and left the room without saying anything, I knew something was wrong.

A group of seven doctors came in the room. They let me know that I had bacteria growing in my bloodstream, due to the dental issues. The bacteria attached to the valve that was recently replaced, and had grown to the size of a marble. If it released, it was instant death. I was immediately admitted into the hospital for my second open heart surgery. This happened one month before the birth of our son, but also right at the time that our first born was turning five years old. The surgery took a little extra long, but ended up being somewhat successful. They were able to remove the bacteria that sat on the valve. They gave me a new valve, but this time it was a metal valve, which meant I would have to be on a blood thinner for the rest of my life. For the most part, the surgery was successful. However, the flesh where the bacteria had been growing had become weak, and the sutures didn't hold. There is a hole in the side of the valve where the sutures didn't hold. Furthermore, the following day, they had to install a pacemaker into my chest. There was some nerve damage done during the surgery, and my heart wouldn't beat on its own. The installation of the pacemaker was a surgery I would not forget. It landed on my daughter's birthday. It was just two days after my open heart surgery. I was still in the hospital for my week long recovery of the heart surgery when they wheeled me back into the operating room. I remember they didn't totally knock me out for the surgery, and when they placed me on a table that felt as narrow as a gymnast's balance beam, it caused my shoulders to roll back and spread my ribs, causing such incredible pain on the ribs that were just cracked open for open heart surgery. The pacemaker was installed somewhat successfully. However, a couple months later, one of the wires was sticking out, probing out of my skin and causing great pain. I had to go back in, on my birthday, to have that wire removed.

Because it was bacteria in the bloodstream that caused all of this, I had to go on daily IV treatments with two of the world's most powerful antibiotics. This lasted for a month. I also went to another dentist who pulled that tooth that was causing problems, as he told

me I didn't even need that tooth. Because my body was wiped of all bacteria, good and bad, I ended up getting a bad recurring illness, called C-Diff. It was a gut infection. Because my body was wiped of all good bacteria, there was none to fight any bad bacteria that might enter. C-Diff is a bad bacteria that quickly eats away at the intestines, gives the worst diarrhea one could experience, and is quite deadly. I would then go on antibiotics to treat C-Diff, only to have that treatment cause other problems in my body, which when treated, caused C-Diff to come back. I battled C-Diff for a couple years when I finally found a great gut-doctor who would perform a fecal transplant on me. It was a process that China invented 500 years earlier. It is what it sounds like. They took the fecal bacteria from a doctor in training, did an endoscopy on me, and sprayed the bacteria all over my gut lining as they removed their probes. It was instant success. Instant. My gut got the good bacteria back, and I have not had any gut problems since.

So here I am, in my early 40's, with two open heart surgeries, a pacemaker and a fecal transplant done to my body. Because I have a metal valve, I have to take daily blood thinners. I have to go to the doctors monthly to get my blood thinness checked. If it was too thick or too thin, then those tests would become weekly and sometimes daily tests. Because I have a pacemaker, I have to go in every three months for device checks, tweaks and adjustments; as they tell me how many more years of battery life the pacemaker has before having to be replaced. Because those sutures didn't hold in the side of the valve, I have to be tested every six months for any increase in the hole size, with the possibility of having a surgery to plug that hole. Through all of this, I went from rarely ever seeing a doctor, to being known by first name, by all the staff at many of the doctor's offices. Sometimes, as I share my thoughts in prayer to God, I say how symbolic things are. My spiritual and emotional heart went through so much, in my arrest and destruction of my career, that it has a hard time beating on it's own, and it just feels very cold and metallic at times. But in the same sentence, I can give God such great thanksgiving, in such huge gratitude for all the new blessings that He had made in my life.

It was nice to be able to take off eight weeks from work again, to recover. Granted, I needed all eight weeks for treatment and to recover, but I also used those eight weeks to help advance my rosary meditation books. In the previous two years, I submitted my books to several publishers and distributors without any success in having them have interest. It was a bit disheartening, but then came those eight weeks of recovery. During those eight weeks, I learned how to create my own website, [www.rosarybooks.com](http://www.rosarybooks.com). I learned how to format my books into every e-book format known. I then self-published my books at electronic e-book stores, such as Barnes and Nobles, Amazon, Apple, Smashwords, and more. I then learned how to make my website a store where I could sell my books. I was excited. I started doing math, and with the hope of having major sells each day, I could head down the road of financial comfort. I was pretty excited. I worked hard on making my website pop up on some of the key searches in Google.

My website went live, and those sales that I was hoping to happen, didn't happen. It was a little bit of dashed hope, but then I had a revelation come to me. I was at my adoration Holy Hour. I was praying for the successful distribution of the books, for God's honor and glory. Then in my thoughts, I was immediately taken back to the months after my arrest. I was wanting to get my hands on any good Catholic reading material, but the prices were out of my range. I couldn't buy those \$19.98 and \$29.99 books. I then

decided, at that holy hour, to make my books free to download, and I would sell the physical books for what it cost me to print them and ship them.

I revisited all those e-book stores. I went back to Barnes and Nobles, Amazon, Apple, and Smashwords. I made it so that whoever wanted to download my book, could do so for free. I then changed the prices at my website, lowering the prices to my cost. I did see some amazing results over the years, and have sold and shipped over 10,000 of the books physically. That in itself is very exciting, but the really exciting thing is that when someone downloads my book to their reading device, it shows me on a map, the exact location of that download, right to the street intersection. Over the years, I have had so many downloads of the book that it is on every continent in the world. The books have made their way from California to New York, from Texas to Montana, from Africa to China, from the Philippines to Indonesia, from Argentina to Switzerland, from Brazil to Italy.

After recovering from my second open heart surgery, my wife and I quickly adapted to the new baby in the house. My wife went through so much, physically, with all of the pregnancies so far. She, in her great physical and spiritual strength, gave birth to three wonderfully healthy children. We had some adjustments to make to our house, turning our garage into another bedroom, and upgrading our travels with a larger vehicle to accommodate our growing family. We had our hands full, but our house was also bristling with energy. It was a house full of joy, happiness, laughter, love and kindness. It was also a house that was filled with the typical tears, crying and fighting that comes from young siblings.

When our youngest turned seventeen months old, we found out we were pregnant again. The excitement levels had changed quite a bit. It went from, "Oh Wow. How Exciting," to "OK. Let's figure out how we are going to do this." We found out it was going to be another little girl. Throughout this pregnancy, there were feelings of, "OK, this is going to be it." But now, I could not imagine life without our daughter, our fourth precious life. However, in my mind, I felt we had reached our capacity. I wanted to continue with Natural Family Planning, and worked very hard on determining the safe time for intimacy. We let month after month go by, truly getting the ovulation cycle down pat. Then, upon feeling it was safe to be intimate just once, we found out a couple weeks later that we were pregnant with our fifth child. It was going to be a boy. It was exciting to know our only boy was going to have a brother of his own. We were going to have five children, under the age of 9, in the home. The pregnancy consisted of trying to figure out how we were going to physically do it. We did figure out how to fit everyone. And of course I couldn't imagine life without our little boy. But at the same time, that is going to have to be it, truly it; for we had a huge health scare with Emily during the birth of this baby.

We have been continuing Natural Family Planning, because in all my growth in purity, I truly feel that intimacy between a husband and wife needs to have God as the foundation. In my experience of going back and forth, I have felt that contraception is kicking God out of this incredible act. I don't want to kick God out. In my wedding, I saw the hand of God holding ours, during the vows and consecration of our wedding bands. It was beautiful to know that my marriage was a marriage with my wife and with God, all three of us, united as one.

And so, almost twenty years later, after my arrest, God has restored me beyond anything I could have dreamed up on my own. He has blessed me with a beautiful and loving wife that I am united to. He has blessed us with five wonderful children. We live in a very nice neighborhood, with great schooling. Our home is truly a home of Christ. I am now able to take my teaching skills, as I get to help teach my children. I get to have science trivia during dinner time. I get to help teach about all those numbers and equations. I get to teach my daughters how to play a guitar. I get to teach my sons how to do so many cool things with art. I get to teach my children how to build and fix things. I get to teach my kids how to walk and ride bikes. I get to teach my kids all about Jesus. I get to teach my kids all my favorite praise and worship songs. I get to teach my kids how to write their name. I get to teach my kids how to go potty on the toilet seat. I get to teach my kids how to write their ABCs. I get to teach my kids how to speak. God had truly restored my teaching. I had prayed over and over again, "Lord, please let me teach again." He answered my prayers. There is that Bible verse that tells us to become childlike. God loves children. In Matthew 18:1-5, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." In my experience as a father, I know that little children love to receive gifts. And God, who is our Father, loves to give us gifts. God loves it when we are like little children in the excitement of those gifts. Just like I am so excited to bestow gifts on all my children, so too is God excited to give gifts to us. He just wants us to receive them, like little children, so full of awe and wonder, so full of joy and excitement, so full of thankfulness and gratitude. Thank you Lord, for all the amazing gifts you have showered on me, making all things new for me, in ways I couldn't have dreamed up on my own. You truly do make all things new.

## Chapter 12

### Final Warning!!!

The phrase, "Patience is a virtue", is commonly used among many people. As a retail worker, I witnessed several people saying this phrase as they waited in line. However, on the topic of virtues, if we asked people to list as many virtues that they could, how complete do you think that list would be? Furthermore, which virtues would be part of that list? Do you think the virtue of Purity would be included in the list? In today's society, I believe that if you mentioned the word, "Purity", most people would think that you were referring to a button on a blender, which seems to be symbolic of what has happened to this virtue. The exposition of modest bodies, the display of an innocent lifestyle, and the desire to honor sinless actions has been chopped, diced, minced, whipped, ground and pureed into corrupted and smutty fashion, immoral and sinful living, accompanied by desecrated and defiled thoughts.

The media has persuaded many people as to how they are to present themselves on the outside. Just look at how much fashion has changed in the last one hundred years. Clothing is coming off. Body parts are being exposed. The lack of modesty has been stripped away. *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) We need to have respect for these temples. There is nothing wrong with adorning this temple with beautiful fashion, as long as it is modest. When you dress to make others look at you with lust, with desires, or with immoral thoughts, you are causing that person to sin. Therefore, are you not sinning yourself? We are to *"please our neighbor for the good, for building up"* (Romans 15:2). We are to *"think in harmony [thoughtful consideration] with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus"* (Romans 15:5).

Now then, you may be wondering where I get off talking about purity when I myself was so caught up in the sins of looking at impure pictures. Well, all I can say is take it from someone who got trapped in that snare. Dress yourselves with respect. Dress your children with the same respect that you want them to have when they start buying their own clothing. When you dress, showing respect toward your body, you will receive respect from others. However, if you dress, showing a lack of respect for your body, treating it as an object on display, that is exactly the feedback you will get from others. Be chaste, dress modestly, and in all your actions, grow in the virtue of purity.

To help in this virtue of purity, we need to learn what it means to be pure. Education plays an important role in helping us understand and grow in this virtue. However, in today's contemporary education, children are taught all about sex, but there is not much teaching about the morals behind it. Any exercise of sex without God's permission easily degenerates into something irreverent and degrading. Sex is the loving and noble self-donation between marriage partners, in which new human life could be created. This concept is usually replaced by a violent craving for physical satisfaction in which another human person is viewed as an object to be used to fulfill that craving. *"The body, however, is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body."* (1 Corinthians 6:13) We need to gain more respect for sex, which involves gaining self-control. This is yet another virtue. The virtue of self-control needs to be practiced early in life. When we practice a life of always getting what we want, it is easier for the body to

become the ruler of the soul, and its demands become more and more domineering. The soul then has a more difficult time keeping those desires under control.

Technology brings a lot of good into living in today's world, but it also has a lot of bad to it as well. My wife and I can immediately see when our little ones have had too much technology. There is a lot more fighting, a lot more bickering, a lot more whining to get what they want. With a lot of frustration from us, Mom and Dad, on those actions, we decide it is time to go on a technology fast. And it is quite amazing how a couple days without the bombardment of technology gets everyone back into a more loving demeanor. As parents, we know it is easy to let the kiddos watch their television shows, or play on the tablets. It can easily become a form of babysitting. But as parents of five little ones, we also see the effects, not only on them, but ourselves. It does take effort to set limits. It does take effort to teach what is good and what is bad. It does take effort to have more family time, and more time with God. But the results are wonderful.

I would say that it is a pretty true statement to say that this modern world is corrupting the minds of the young people, and all of us. Everywhere we go, all that we do, there is a form of media influencing our lives. With our eyes, we soak up what the media has to offer. With our ears, we absorb messages and information it presents. Through our lips and our body, we then begin to imitate all that has been absorbed into our minds and our hearts. Granted, there is a lot of good to the media. It can educate us in a positive manner. It can help us grow spiritually, with the good that it presents. It keeps us informed, and it can help us operate our lives more efficiently. However, when one really takes a concentrated look at the media, one cannot deny the evil that has infested it.

I once heard of a story from "The Navigators" that symbolized the evil that has manifested itself into the media, and thus into the lives of all those that are affected by it. Basically, Satan had a large board meeting with all the evil spirits. In this meeting Satan had devised a plan to divert people from getting to know God. He told all the evil spirits to enter into the media. "Get into the television," he said. "Infest it, but make it look intriguing, suspenseful, and drama filled. Get into the movies, and in these movies, show people doing evil thing. Make these movies to be the box office hits. Get into the music for the youth to listen to. Get into the youths' minds early in their lives. While you are at it, prevent anyone from hearing God's voice by distracting them with the sound of music in every public place they enter. This will jam their minds and prevent them from entering into a conversation with Christ. Infest their playtime with video games. Hammer their minds with the news. Interrupt their driving with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, catalogues, sweepstakes, and every kind of advertising offering, free merchandise, service and every kind of deceiving hope. Prevent them from getting out into nature. Instead, send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies. And when they do meet for spiritual gatherings, involve them in gossip so that they will leave with distraught consciences and restless emotions. And one more thing, take advantage of the computer. Infest the Internet with great power, for it is untamed. Right now, the pure of heart have no control over it. If we infest it early, it will be impossible to get rid of us. Then, my little evil spirits, when we have entered into their lives, into their homes, and into their souls, then we will become victorious, for they will begin to live what they see and hear. These humans are weak, and they believe whatever is presented to them. So get out there and get into all forms of the media. Speak to them in ways that seem inconspicuous. Trust me, they will believe it to be the truth. Once you

have accomplished this, you will be able to enter their souls. Then, they will belong to me! So get busy my evil spirits, and let's go conquer many souls. There is no time to waste. Make me proud of you."

You can be the judge, but to me, this previous description of Satan's infested evil in the media sure seems accurate. The typical statement that argues the idea that the media is corrupted with evil is usually a view that simply states, "It is normal. It is just part of life. It is common. It is not evil." And these were some of the comments coming from my mind as I was living a life of sin. For you see, when one absorbs so much evil into their lives, it is easy to become oblivious to it. It becomes easier to be desensitized and numb to it, not accepting it for what it truly is. Just like any evil, it will start out as minor displays of sin. However, once we accept that into our minds as "something that is just part of our world", then Satan starts building on those minor ideas, and before we know it, we are accepting more extreme forms of evil to be absorbed into our minds. I hold this concept to be very true, because I lived and experienced it. Furthermore, when people become desensitized to this sin, they start portraying it in their actions.

After my arrest, I hadn't watched anything on television for almost a year. Seven months after my arrest, after finishing up my day at work, I got home, plopped myself down on the sofa, and contemplated on how I had not watched any television since the night of the search warrant. It had been seven months. I decided to sit back, relax, and watch a show or two. There was no cable reception on this television. Rather, it was an antenna reception of the four basic television stations. When I turned on the television, I was blown away with what I witnessed.

It was 7:00 p.m., so I figured I would be able to watch some type of after dinner family show. However, right when I turned on the television, I witnessed a teenage girl telling her dad that he was a jerk, but in words that I don't care to repeat in this book. I couldn't believe what I had just heard. I immediately changed the channel. As I was watching the next show, trying to figure out what the plot was, I figured out it was supposed to be a humorous show, in which the apocalypse was going to take place. The characters in that show all joined a cult, waiting for the end of the world, which was going to take place in five minutes. When the end of the world did not come, all the characters got mad at the leader of the cult. One character was mad because she sold all her children as a sacrifice. Another character was mad because he castrated himself. And yet a third character was mad at the cult leader because the cult leader was sleeping with his wife, at which the leader said that it was the wife's idea. The wife then responded by saying, "I thought the end of the world was coming, and I never had another man before." As I watched that show for five minutes, I was blasted with sin after sin. I again changed the channel.

The next channel I flipped to was a show that took place at a Halloween party. Everyone was dressed in some sort of costume. There was a lot of drinking and people making out. The camera effects were as if one was on some type of visual drug. The next thing I knew, a guy busts into a bedroom where he sees his girlfriend on the bed with another guy. The conflict arose from there. The plot of that show was full of sin, but what churned my stomach even more were the costumes that the girl and guy on the bed, making out, were wearing. The guy was dressed up as a priest, and the girl was dressed in a Catholic schoolgirl uniform, wearing an extremely short skirt and a bra. Quickly turning the channel to the last station on the television, I was blasted with images of

gunfire, death and hate. Immediately, I turned off the television, wished I would have never turned it on, and went outside to sit in reflective prayer.

It was a cold, drizzly, dark and cloudy sky. It felt very evil. Sitting there in contemplation, I realized how easy it is to become desensitized to the sins portrayed in entertainment. I realized that if I had watched television every day, for the past seven months, I would have been desensitized to what I had just witnessed. I may have recognized it as sin, but I probably would have kept watching. However, because I had not subjected myself to television for seven months, I was easily able to see the sin that was portrayed, and I didn't want to subject myself to such ideas, let alone condone those acts by continuing to watch the show. In my observations, I am seeing a world that is getting worse and worse, and we need to change. God has given us a "*blessing or a curse. Choose life and we shall live. Choose death and we will die*" (Deuteronomy 31:19 I). I'm afraid that we are a nation that has chosen death. We live in a nation that is saturated with the culture of death; abortion, materialism, selfishness, egocentrism, pride, hatred, anger, violence and addictions of entertainment, sex, drugs, food, and any form of self-gratification. If we continue living this culture of death, God's wrath will be imminent, in which no one will be able to stand, and at which St. Faustina's diary says, "prepare the world for the Second Coming of Him who will come, not as a merciful Savior, but as a just Judge. Oh, how terrible is that day! Determined is the day of justice, the day of divine wrath. The angels tremble before it. (St. Faustina's Diary, Entry 635)" We need to change our ways now! Be holy. Live holy lives. Stand up against evil. Spread God's love.

*Medjugorje message of August 25, 1991 "Dear Children! Today also I invite you to prayer, now as never before when my plan has begun to be realized. **Satan is strong and wants to sweep away plans of peace and joy and make you think that my Son is not strong in his decisions.** Therefore, I call all of you, dear children to pray and fast still more firmly. I invite you to realize through the secrets I began in Fatima may be fulfilled. **I call you, dear children, to grasp the importance of my coming and the seriousness of the situation.** I want to save all souls and present them to God. Therefore, let us pray that everything I have begun be fully realized. Thank you for having responded to my call."*

Once one is able to recognize that evil is running rampant throughout all forms of the media, one needs to take a closer look as to why they would want that incorporated into their lives. God calls us to a simplistic life. It is through simplicity that we are better able to spend more time with each other and with Him. I know there are different opinions from people about the media. One person may accept that the media has bad parts to it, but they continue to watch and listen to it. They may say something like, "I watch this one show because it is funny, or it has a good message. I know there was a small scene that showed a murder, and another scene of impurity, but overall the message presented throughout the show was a good message." I remember growing up, in the 1980's, and we would watch television and movies as a family. There were times when Mom or Dad would yell out, "Cover your eyes kids", or "Cover your ears", during those little snippets

of bad words, killings, and scenes of impurity. There were those little bad segments thrown into the overall mix. With a thought process of thinking that what I watch is overall good, I want you to think about a simple analogy. Think of a nice refreshing glass of ice cold water on a hot summer day. Imagine that you have been working or playing outside, and you are really thirsty. You know the cold glass of ice water would taste really good. However, what if someone came up to it, right in front of your eyes, and put a few drops of deadly poison in the cup. Would you still drink it? For the most part, 99% of it is good, but there is 1% that is pure poison. Would you still drink it? Of course not! It would get in your body, and possibly lead to death.

*Medjugorje message for February 13, 1986 "Dear children! This Lent is a special incentive for you to change. Start from this moment. **Turn off the television and renounce various things that are of no value.** Dear children, I am calling you individually to conversion. This season is for you. Thank you for having responded to my call."*<sup>2</sup>

It is through simplistic lives that we will find more time for the one true God. However, we tend to find ourselves saying that we can't live our lives without technology. And it is true, technology is needed in order to operate in our modern world, but we have to be careful to what extent we use that media and technology. In my personal life, I recognized, through my extreme experience, that the Internet had become my false god. When I subscribed to the Internet, I did not realize all of what I had brought into my house, and thus, into my life. What every person needs to know is that when you subscribe to the Internet, you have brought instant access to sinful evil, on an exponential level, into your home. It is untamed, and is known to be like the Wild West. Granted, it is only access to evil. However, humans fall into temptations. That is a known fact. And when you have access to evil, just a mouse click away, it is very easy to fall into the temptations found on the Internet. Granted, just like all forms of the media, there is a lot of good to the Internet. However, just like all forms of the media, it is infested with evil. You may even come across this evil without the desire to do so. For example, you may be using the Internet to search for information on how to build a dollhouse for your daughter. But as you search the Internet, using the search words "doll house", you will then become shocked with some of the sites that appear on your computer. All types of pornography sites could simply arrive on your computer without you wanting them to. This is why I say it is untamed, like the Wild West.

Before my experience, I did not know the Internet was untamed, without any governing. When I first started using the Internet, it was very resourceful. Information that I used for the classroom, which used to take me several days to retrieve, could be retrieved in a matter of minutes. But just like the example I listed before, some of my searches led to places I did not know existed. With access to places that fed my temptations, and with no one around watching me, or otherwise ever finding out what I was doing, I learned how to find an unlimited supply of pornography. I had allowed the evil that had infested the media to be brought into my life. This fed my temptations, which then became addictions. I found out that there were thousands, if not millions of sites that gave an unlimited amount of free pornography, with hundreds of new pictures

updated daily. And this was back in the year 2002. Satan had a grip on me. And so I warn you about the evils that exist in the Internet, so that he may not get a grip on you as well.

When you bring the Internet into your home, it is as if you are bringing millions of “stores” into your home. For example, let’s say your child is on the Internet in their bedroom. They type in some key words for a search they are doing. Then, all these stores are placed in front of their eyes. They see this one “store” which tells them not to enter unless they are over eighteen years old. It has flashing lights, and seems very intriguing. There is no one in his or her room, and no one is in the store. They figure no one will see them if they decide to go in to explore. They may know that they shouldn’t go in, but it is so tempting, with all its attractive lights. So they go in to look around, and boom, Satan grabs your child.

The main problem is that when you bring the Internet into your home, it is a form of the media that is ungoverned. Granted, there are laws about certain things you can and cannot do, but you are required to know those laws, especially since unlawful things can pop up on your computer without your wanting them to. And as I harshly realized, there is no excuse for ignorance to the law. This is very scary, especially since the law can end up locating every site that you ever visited.

Every site I visited on the Internet said it was legal in the U.S. I figured that if the sites were illegal, then I would not be able to view them on my computer. I knew what I was doing was immoral, but not illegal. However, I found out later that those sites that posted they were legal, were not actually legal. That was when I truly realized how much the Internet is ungoverned. However, even if the Internet is ungoverned, you are still required to know the laws. Well, I know the basic laws of the land. I know not to kill anyone. I know not to steal. I know not to drink and drive. I know not to be violent. I know those types of laws. However, I didn’t know there were laws that could lead a person to five years in prison for visiting certain Internet sites, just a mouse-click away.

Thinking everything I was doing was legal, I fed my addictions. That feeding of my addictions took over the time I should have spent focusing on my spiritual life. And as you know, by reading my story, God saw that I had put Him on the backburner. He had to step in and retake control of my life. Thus, came my extreme experience. God had stepped in and destroyed my false gods. My priorities and spiritual vision got back on track, and I decided to go all out. I reevaluated my forms of media. I no longer prescribe to the generic television cable programming, which for the most part was good and clean, but would have little snippets of poison thrown in. I wanted to pick and choose what I wanted in my entertainment life. Through our high-tech world today, we are able to pick and choose those channels to subscribe to. I signed up for a Flix channel that was based off of faith and family. A Flix that was pure.

There are many faith and family channels, whether through cable or simply through the smart TV, that one could sign up for. When I purchase my movies, I do my research, to make sure they do not have those bits of poison to them, where I have to tell my kids to close their eyes, or cover their ears during certain scenes. And with today’s technology, the smart app that I buy my movies from allows us to watch those movies in “family friendly” mode, skipping over those foul words, or those impure scenes. I pick and choose what to bring into my house. We have been able to function just fine in this high-tech, high-entertainment world. In doing this, I have made my life more simplistic, which I have found to be a very good thing. Our smart phone that we own is more of a

tablet device. We leave it at home. I don't take it with me everywhere I go. I again pick and choose those good apps to have installed on it; from the fun game apps for the kids, to the high-tech apps of paying bills, checking insurance, and even turning on the Christmas lights outside. At times, it seems hard to live a simplistic life in such a complicated world, but that is a hope of mine.

Here is my prayer that has resulted through my life experiences. Let us arise together and destroy those false gods in our lives. Let us return to simplicity. Let us make more time in our lives to spend with our Lord. Let us imitate Jesus in all that we do, who lived a life of meekness and lowliness. Let us always call on Jesus in all our needs and temptations, whose name brings cries of terror from evil spirits and demons. Let us emanate Jesus' warmhearted and approachable lifestyle. Let us mimic Jesus by being compassionate toward sinners, yet speaking out against sin. Let us serve one another, even if it means picking up the towel to wash each other's feet. Let us be faithful, hopeful, and charitable by example. Let us persevere in self-control as we strive to be humble, obedient, patient, and pure. Let us worship God, all in one accord, and let us Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray!

## **Chapter 13**

### **Fighting the Good Fight**

As humans, there seems to be something implanted in us that leads to a desire of exploring. Throughout my childhood, while growing up in the foothills of Colorado, I was constantly exploring. My backyard of 14 acres was a place of endless exploration. I would hike the mountains, roam around the gulches, enter fantasy worlds in the large trees, and explore my creative mind in the outdoors. Great distances separated all the houses where I grew up, or at least they seemed like great distances as a child. This led to an endless amount of childhood exploration. Right around one of the hills in my backyard was a cave. With the typical exploring mind of a child, I would have been excited to investigate that cave. However, my parents educated me about the dangers of it. Plus, there were signs posted all over the entrance to the cave, stating, “Danger, Do Not Enter! Unsafe! Keep Out!” Because of this, I never explored that cave.

The Internet is like my childhood backyard. There are so many fun and wonderful things and places to explore. However, the internet has a big dark cave that is very dangerous. It is the cave of pornography. Unlike the cave in my backyard, the cave of pornography has no warning signs posted over the entrances, stating how dangerous those sites are. Instead, the sites are posted with alluring bait to pull one inside. My conviction happened in 2002. From research, I know that pornography has expanded exponentially since then. In all that I have experienced, I want to share some things on how to fight the good fight.

It is scientifically proven that a powerful, mood altering chemical is released when one views porn, which ends up rewiring the mind, until the viewer craves it more than they crave real human interaction. Pornography always creates shame, which makes the users isolate themselves, and then they return to porn to cope. It is a vicious cycle that is causing so much damage. According to webroot.com, 28,258 users are watching pornography on the internet every second. Every Second, \$3075 is being spent on internet pornography. Every day, there are 68 million search queries related to pornography, and 116,000 queries related to child pornography. According to enough.org, in 1998, there were over 3,000 reports of child pornography images on the internet. Just over a decade later, that report soared past 100,000. In 2014, that number surpassed 1 million, and just last year, in 2019, there were 18.4 million images of child pornography on the internet.

The amount of people addicted to pornography is staggering. According to Covenant Eyes, 65% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month. 57% of teens search out porn at least monthly and 71% of teens hide their online behavior from their parents. According to Covenant Eyes, 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use porn on a regular basis and are currently struggling.

From personal experience, I know that when one delves into the evil of viewing pornography, they are allowing demons to enter into their soul. I know this because I saw those demons in my recovery from this evil. I physically saw them. Of course, the great answer to all this would be to remove pornography from the internet. Instead of having to take steps and pay money to have it filtered, it should be reversed. One should have to take difficult public steps and pay money to have access to porn on their computer. But I guess that is in a dream world. My recovery was a tough road. My success was through

tons of prayer, self-control, and being part of the sex rehab program. Through that program, I learned to flee from the temptations when they arose. I mentioned it early in my story. This is an evil you don't want to sit around and try to fight. It is like a deadly snake right in front of you. Are you going to try to stick around and fight the snake, or are you going to get far away from it? Of course you are going to flee. This is the main weapon I have used over the years. This is the main weapon that has led to my success. I flee. And I flee on the spot.

Recently, I purchased a Virtual Reality Headset. It was pretty amazing to experience. I put the headset on, and it felt like I was having a real life experience. I could be on a cliff in Ireland, looking all around, truly feeling like I was there. I could be in a race car, experiencing what it truly feels like to go at fast speeds. I could be in a hammock on the beach, listening to the waves crashing. It was truly an amazing experience. With those virtual reality goggles on, it felt like real life. I cannot explain what an amazing experience it was. However, in my exploration through this new technology device, I accidentally came across virtual reality pornography. I immediately fled from it. However, now I knew that virtual reality porn existed. I knew that it was there, at the click of a button. The temptation was there. I knew that I couldn't stick around to try to fight that pornography serpent that crossed my path. I really didn't want to get rid of the headset, as I had some amazing experiences that were healthy and educational, but I knew the thought of the immoral was there, and so I had to flee. So I fled from it. I got rid of the headset. If I decided to keep it, and try to be strong in fighting against going to those virtual reality pornography sites, it would be like sticking around to fight the snake in front of me. But instead I decided to flee from the snake that crossed my path. I got the heck out of there by getting rid of the headset. That is how this evil is fought. In doing my previous research on pornography statistics, to include in this book, I found out that Virtual Reality pornography is soaring. It is projected to be a \$1 billion business by the year 2025.

In talking all about this, and these devastating statistics, I almost lose hope, feeling as if there is no way to fight this evil. One of the main problems is our desensitized world. Our world says that if you do not want that "sinful" stuff in your house, then you can buy filters to prevent it from entering your computer. This is a good start in preventing this evil from entering your home. However, does anyone see the problem with this? We live in a world where you have to go out of your way to put forth effort, time, and money to prevent this sinful stuff from entering your house. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Shouldn't it already be prevented from entering into the house? But if you are a person that desires to bring this sinful stuff in your life, then you should be the one that puts the money, time and public effort into getting it. But no, as the courts say, that is a violation of first amendment rights. However, the same courts that say it is a violation of rights were the same courts that came into my home and arrested me for violating certain rights of visiting certain sites. It just doesn't make any sense.

In a perfect world, the Internet needs to be safer than what it is. It needs to be similar to cable television service. If there is something illegal, just like cable television, it should not be allowed through the service to the customer. If something illegal was viewed through cable television, it would be the cable service provider or the creator of the illegal images who would be held liable, not the customer. An example of this was with a Calvin Klein underwear ad that was aired on television, nationally.<sup>1</sup> Millions of

viewers saw pictures of a girl under the age of 18, showing her underwear, as she was seductively displayed. After great controversy, this ad was pulled from the television, as it was considered to be a form of child-pornography. The millions of viewers were not held responsible, but the company that produced the ad was. Similarly, if something is viewed through the Internet that is illegal, it should be the Internet Service Provider or the creator of the illegal images that are held liable, not the user. If this were true, you would see all Internet Providers making sure that anything illegal was prevented from entering a customer's computer. That, again, would be in an ideal world. We don't currently live in that ideal world, but we can take individual steps, on our own part, to head towards that ideal world.

To assist with the power behind fleeing, is the power of being held accountable. Accountability is something that is very important. Without it, we can easily go off the deep end, thinking there is no problem at all. A good example of accountability is King David. Throughout my story, we followed many of the actions of King David. Let us look at his story one last time. The person that kept David accountable was the prophet, Nathan. Nathan was always there, as a messenger from God, to keep David in line. Nathan was there to wag his finger in David's face, keeping him informed of his errors. Each time Nathan came to inform David of the errors in his ways, David refocused his actions and got back on track. We all need a prophet Nathan in our own lives. Figure out who that accountability partner is going to be in your life. Is it going to be a spiritual director? Is it going to be your spouse? Is it going to be a parent, or a sibling, or a close friend? Having an accountability partner is good for many aspects of growing in many of the virtues besides purity. I advise seeking out your own Nathan, if you don't have one already.

As for the Internet, there is a way we can be held accountable. Get an internet filter provider installed on your computer. This will filter out the "bad" sites to which you do not want access. You can also set up your technology device to be family friendly, or kid friendly. However, not all settings on your technology devices, or all internet filters, will do the job 100%, for there are hundreds of new pornographic sites added each day. However, having a filter and having proper settings on your devices are strong steps in preventing much of the immorality from entering into your eyes. It is also important to have the computer in an open area, where it can be monitored. The privacy of a bedroom is one of the worst places to put a computer. There should also be time restrictions put on computer use, especially limiting the use of the Internet to certain hours. Those hours should be when one is able to monitor the computer. Some of the filter software that you can purchase has the capability of setting those time restriction. If you use a provider that uses "accountability partners", such as I used, there is some important information I want to pass along to you. An important part of this accountability, especially for those already addicted to the immorality of the Internet, is to always remember that as a supporter, you are there to help, not to condemn. A person who is addicted to lust needs honesty, support and accountability to help overcome their addiction. I needed to be totally honest, which was the truth that set me free. In that display of honesty, I received support, which helped in the process of healing. If I had received condemnation from my display of honesty, it would have been easy not to be honest, but to be sneaky, and to hide my activity, which would have caused me to stay with the lifestyle I was living.

Finally, the greatest thing one can do in overcoming this evil, is to spend time in prayer, with God. Through this prayer, it is easier to flee when the serpent crosses your path. Through prayer, it is easier to be held humbly accountable. Through prayer, it is easier to hold the desire to have those computer settings and internet filters to help you in the fight. We are all called to “*fight the good fight*” (1 Timothy 6:12), and to “*put on the armor of light*” (Romans 13:12). When we put on this armor of light, we are “*putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and making no provision for the desires of the flesh*” (Romans 13:14). Thus, we all need to put on the armor of knowledge, educating the young, each other, and ourselves of the dangers out there. We are to grab firm to the shield of accountability, holding our spouse, our child, our friends, or ourselves accountable, to the point of helping, not condemning. We are to arm ourselves with the sword of truth, knowing what God teaches, and living it in our lives. Once we are dressed for this battle, we need to always remember that the good soldier is the one who is in constant training, in tiptop performance. Therefore, we need to be in constant training as we keep a prayerful life. Frequent the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist, Holy Confession, and spend time in adoration, before Christ. Pray, pray, pray, and you will grow, grow, grow in an intimate relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

From experience, if one perseveres in taking these steps, the fruits will inevitably start to blossom. “*Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” (Galatians 5:18-22) Isn't the fruit of the Spirit enticing? Of course we all want more love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, goodness and self-control. Just as in nature, the fruit of the Spirit is the result of a growth process. It takes effort to grow fruit. It takes graces. It takes time. I can see this physically happen with the apple trees in our back yard. In the Spring, it first starts out as a flower, then moves to a bud, then grows until in the Fall, it has matured into a ripe apple. It takes time though. It needs water, light and heat to bring it to its full growth.

In my experience, God watered my thirsty spirit as I spent time with Him, in the sacraments and in adoration. Through that time period, His watering of my soul softened the soil of my heart, so that I could receive the seeds of the fruit. As I attended Mass, or read through Holy Scripture, His light shined on my heart and mind. As I wrote journal books, and rewrote scripture quotes that were meaningful to me, God enlightened my thoughts and my feelings. Along with water and light, I went through a very humiliating and life changing experience. I went through a lot of heat. Fruit ripens in heat. Through those uncomfortable and painful experiences, God's heat brought forth its full fruit. “Thank you Father God my creator, Jesus my redeemer, and Holy Spirit my sanctifier, for watering, lighting, and heating my life as You cultivated Your fruit in me.” Amen

## Endnotes

### **Chapter One: Background Information**

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### **Chapter Two: Entrenched in a Battle – My Double Life**

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### **Chapter Four: Lord, Show Me My Sins Through Your Eyes**

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### **Chapter Five: Loss of Heaven Due to Sin**

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### **Chapter Eight: Do Not Fear, For I Am With You**

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