

REFLECTIONS ON MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“God speaks to us through our lives, we often too easily say. Something speaks anyway, spells out some sort of godly or godforsaken meaning to us through the alphabet of our years, but often it takes many years and many further spellings out before we start to glimpse, or think we do, a little of what that meaning is. Even then we glimpse it only dimly, like the first trace of dawn on the rim of night, and even then it is a meaning that we cannot fix and be sure of once and for all because it is always incarnate meaning and thus as alive and changing as we are ourselves alive and changing.”¹ These words from Frederick Buechner express the process I have been undergoing during the past 20 years or so – to be truthful, as far back as my entry into University the first time, in 1966. I did not know, then, what I was to do with my life. I thought I wanted to be a lawyer, but that desire quietly dissipated by Christmas of my first year. I did know what I did not want to do with my life – to be a priest – and for that reason avoided all connection with Trinity College until the fall of 2002. In fact, I don’t believe I ever crossed its threshold all the time I was at or around the University of Toronto.

Since I have consciously been a seeker for meaning in my life during the last ten years, I thought that by now I would have worked out all of the issues about who I am or am not. I believed that the work I had done on myself through the School of Philosophy had brought me to a point of indifference to results, to pride or shame, to pleasure or

¹ Frederick Buechner, Listening to Your Life, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1992) 12-13, quoted in The Online Retreat in Daily Life, Week 4, Creighton University (www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html)

pain – a place where I would not be “attached” to ideas about who and what “I am”. I therefore did not anticipate much difficulty in sharing my story with two of my classmates. To my chagrin, I found that it was not quite so easy.

As the reader will note, the attached “Summary of My Autobiography” (Annex 1) is not the specified 2 pages of double-spaced prose; but rather, 2 pages of single-spaced, rather densely packed prose. There is not much white space there, and there are a host of things I have either précised to the bone or omitted after some serious soul-searching about what just could not be left out. The embarrassing thing, to me at least, is that I have omitted pretty much all information about thoughts, feelings, family, spiritual formation and where God has been in that journey. I found it extremely difficult to “unattach” myself from all of the various events in my life which obviously still define who I think I am... or would like others to think I am. In the words of the Opening Prayer from the Online Retreat in Daily Life, it would seem I am still “... full of busyness and running after stuff that doesn’t really seem to matter or last.”²

It was my intention to use that “summary” as notes, so to speak, for my little talk to my two colleagues; and to flesh-out all the things I had omitted, due to lack of space – the touchy-feely things – in the flow of my exposition. I was certain that I would have no trouble doing that; particularly that part concerning my journey over the last ten years, which has had such strong influence on my being here now, in this program, seeking ordination if that be God’s will for me. I never even got that far.

I had not been able to be present during the demonstration of an autobiography in class. I had to attend a Worship Team Meeting that week, which was held concurrently. I therefore relied on what I had heard of the demonstration – that it began

² The Online Retreat in Everyday Life, Week One, Creighton University, (www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html)

at the beginning, discussed grandparents, parents, siblings, school career and work placements in a chronological order and in some detail. I, therefore, felt compelled to attempt to do the same. As a result, I gave too much attention to describing my parents' backgrounds and families, how they had met in the RCAF during the war – my father had been my mother's commanding officer at Trenton - my early life as a child growing up in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Oakville and did not leave myself enough time to talk about the bits where God was really present and where I was undergoing some serious passages. All of a sudden, I found myself with only 5 minutes remaining to cover the parts that I had considered to be the most important to share – the parts that have been crucial to my spiritual formation during the past ten years. Of course, I did not have enough time, and did not even do a good job of hitting the highlights. I was left with a curious sense of dissatisfaction ... and disappointment. I truly did want to share these things. I do know that to it is vital to do so, for reasons that Buechner has so aptly expressed:

“It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are – even if we tell it only to ourselves – because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going. It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about. Finally, I suspect that it is by entering that deep place inside us where our secrets are kept that we come perhaps closer than we do

anywhere else to the One who, whether we realize it or not, is of all our secrets the most telling and the most precious we have to tell.”³

Therefore, in the spirit of Buechner, let me unburden myself now.

On re-reading the “Summary” what I had meant to convey is the feeling of ennui that had pervaded much of my first 45 years. I had never truly felt fulfilled in what I was studying and by the work I was doing. I had more or less drifted into the financial services industry by default, not by design. The industrial psychologists had determined “insurance” was a field suitable for me, and so one after another employment counselors sent me to interview at insurance companies after I left University. Canada Life convinced me that insurance was where I could make my mark, and so I began a career path I have followed until today. However, the autobiography illustrates that my heart and mind was truly elsewhere, for I gave a lot of my attention to things other than insurance sales. My avocations became my true vocation in a manner of speaking ... and yet, not true enough for I never had the desire, or perhaps the courage, to leave the financial services field for some other career path.

Matters came to a head for me in 1989, when I bought a financial planning practice in Belleville out of a desire to have more quality time with my family – in Belleville I could live and work in the same compact community, unlike the Greater Toronto Area where I seemed to criss-cross most of it. Unfortunately, or so it seemed at the time, things did not work out the way I had planned; and my wife decided to end our marriage. The subsequent 4 years were truly the dark night of my soul. Having been stripped of my marriage and my children I was also stripped of my business and my self-esteem.

³ Frederick Buechner, Telling Secrets, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991) 2-3, , quoted in The Online Retreat in Daily Life, Week 2, Creighton University (www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html)

I was sharing office space with the person I had bought the practice from in the first place. His plans had not worked out and he had wanted back into the business. In a personal services enterprise it is difficult, as a newcomer to a community, to contest with someone who was born and bred there. I did not feel, therefore, that it could keep the client base I had purchased if he were to make a determined effort to reclaim it. We therefore evolved into a joint practice, not quite a partnership. However his financial affairs were not as stable as he made them appear to be, After several months he declared bankruptcy and moved out, leaving me with the full responsibility for the leases on the office space, equipment, and telephone system; and for the wages of our secretary. In 1991 and 1992 the Belleville – Trenton area was hard hit by the recession. It seemed half of the stores in the community had closed, and there were fewer and fewer industrial jobs to be had as factories down-sized, closed or relocated. Between my personal hell and the economy I could not earn enough fast enough to keep it all afloat, and so lost the business,

For several months I spent my own time in the wilderness, living on a boat on Frenchman's Bay in Pickering. Just me and my thoughts. I had a hard time understanding why God had taken everything and everybody I valued from me; but curiously, I never denied him or ceased to believe.

I do admit to being more than somewhat confused by what had and was happening. I was a Church person after all. I attended Church regularly, was a parish council member and a warden ... why was all this happening to me? And why was God wasting my talents, my skills, my attributes? Surely he did not act capriciously. Why was I given the abilities he had given me, the training I had undergone if it was not to be of any use to anyone?

Eventually, I surfaced from my funk and determined to try to put myself back together again. My first step was finding a support group to help me deal with the issues surrounding my marriage breakdown that I had not yet dealt with or taken responsibility for. That search led me to the Beaches Self Support Group, and a return to Toronto.

In the process of re-establishing myself in the financial services community I discovered that I had been changed by the passage I had undergone. I had been radicalized in the sense of becoming sensitized to the issues of marriage breakdown and job loss that I had experienced first hand. Indeed, it seemed that there was a strong positive correlation between the two ... particularly for men. That awareness developed into a need to do something to make a difference, and so I became active in the leadership of the Beaches Separate Support Group, where I met my present wife, Kay, and was given a second chance at life – by God, I believe. The involvement in the BSSG led to starting a re-employment support group for the members who had lost both spouse and job, which eventually led to King-Bay Chaplaincy, and my involvement in Operation Bootstrap. My involvement in King-Bay also reconnected me with my Christian roots, and through the Discovery or Cursillo exposed me to prayer, witness and sharing on a much deeper level than I had previously experienced. It also opened new networks of friends who helped me to rebuild my life and some sense of purpose and worth.

In 1996, my wife and I went to Sri Lanka for Christmas, to be with her mother and family at the Paynter Home for Destitute Children in city of Nuwara Eliya. On the plane we had been sharing the book “Halftime: Changing Your Life From Success to Significance”, by Bob Buford. At the airport in Colombo we were met by a member of the Homes Trust Board, whose very first words to us were, “We need you here, please

come!” Over the course of the next two and a half weeks, we were touched by the children and by the need – they truly did need us there – and we returned to Canada determined to see how it could be done. Both of us felt that what we were doing in Canada was not so special or important. We could easily be replaced by any of a great many people. We certainly were not indispensable. In Sri Lanka, however, they had desperate need of everything we had to offer. It appeared that the purpose for which we had been put on earth, and the fulfillment of the training and experiences we had been given, had been found, and both of us decided to answer that call. Accordingly we sold our house and our possessions to finance our new life, and moved to Sri Lanka.

As it happened, we were not able to stay in Sri Lanka permanently, due to the immigration laws in that country. Thus, we go and stay for several months at a time, and then return to Canada. As a result it falls to us to do the deputation work in the west which has not been actively pursued for some time.

Our experience in Sri Lanka, working with Sri Lankan clergy and lay people has brought us to an understanding that our place now is back in the West. The work in Sri Lanka must be in Sri Lankan hands going forward, The days of the Western “missionary” in such places are numbered. They do, however, still need western expertise and financial resources to become self sufficient. Our task is to help them get there. How exactly that is to unfold is not yet clear. However, part of doing so, for me it seems is becoming ordained. At least this is the way I appear to be led. In the circumstances, I can only agree with Cardinal Newman, who said:

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons> He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of Peace, a preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it – if I do but keep his commandments.

Whatever, wherever I am I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me – still He knows what He is about. Therefore I will trust Him.⁴

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⁴ Cardinal Newman, A Meditation, The Online Retreat in Daily Life, Week 11, Creighton University (www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html)

ABOUT BRIAN BARTLEY

AGE

EVENTS

- 0/6 Born at Toronto Western Hospital on April 15th, 1947; the first child of George and Jessie Bartley. Two sisters – Marion and Laura – born in 1949 and 1951 respectively. Was a blue baby – with a “hole” in my heart that was monitored until Grade 3. Did not go to Kindergarten. Enrolled in Grade One at Dublin Public School in Toronto. Maternal grandmother lived with us until I was 12.
- 7/11 Family moved to Winnipeg in 1954. Attended Queenston Public School and St. Aidan’s Church. Was in cubs and a variety of Christmas pageants.
- 12/14 Family relocated to Oakville, attended Wilson, then Woodside public schools. Sixer in Cubs. Joined Scouts. Attended St. Jude’s Church Oakville.
- 14/19 Altar Server at St. Jude’s. Attended T. A. Blakelock High School. Continued Scouts. Earned Queen Scout, Bushman’s Thong and Gold Cord. Appointed Troop Leader Attended World Scout Jamboree in Greece. Defensive end on Football Team. Captain of Rifle Team. Won senior "Football" and senior Athletic letters. Head of Servers Guild at St. Jude’s. Cadet "Commanding Officer" of School Cadet Corps. Earned Master Cadet Award. Participated in United Nations Club. Helped coordinate a campaign to increase food aid to India, and with others presented a petition to The Minister for External Affairs in Ottawa.
- 19/23 Entered New College, University of Toronto, in Social & Philosophical Studies. A founder of "Area" Rover Crew, and became its Mate. A founder of Regional Rover Round Table, and Rover-Ranger joint "Moots". Served as acting Scout Master of the 9th Trafalgar Scout Troop. Managed the Camera Shop at Sayvette, Dixie Mall. Served with The 48th Highlanders of Canada as a Platoon Commander, Signals Officer, Transport Officer, Company Second-in-Command and Summer Course Commander (Student Militia).
- 24/25 Bachelor of Arts (Political Science and Sociology), the University of Toronto, Married Gayle in 1972.
- 26/30 Joined Canada Life as a Sales Representative in Toronto. Continued service with the 48th Highlanders as Staff Officer at Area Headquarters, Quartermaster, and Company Commander of Headquarters/Support Company. Moved to Milton, Ontario. Daughter, Brenna, born in 1976. Son, Andrew, born in 1979.
- 31/32 Joined North American Life (Nalaco) as Field Training Specialist in the Head Office. Continued service with the 48th Highlanders as Company Commander of the trained company and the Mobile Command Tasked Company.
- 33/37 Transferred to Nalaco’s Financial Planning Division as Planning Assistant. Granted Chartered Life Underwriter designation (CLU) in 1979. Promoted to Financial Planning Consultant responsible for financial planning services

Canada-wide. Speaker at the LIMRA Advanced Sales Forum in Chicago. Authored a series of financial planning articles for business and trade publications. Continued service with the 48th Highlanders as Company Commander. Promoted to Major and served as Battalion Operations and Training Officer. Graduated from the Militia Staff Course. Joined Parish Council at Grace Church Milton.

- 37/39 Established a financial planning practice – Bartley, Payette & Company – in Hamilton. Co-founded computer software firm, R.O.I. Strategies Inc., to create financial planning software. Company could not establish sufficient market penetration and was closed.
- 40/42 Relocated to Toronto as Regional Vice-President of Integrated Financial Services, a financial brokerage company. Also established a planning partnership, B/A Capital Management. Continued service with the 48th Highlanders, commanding the tasked company, culminating in the command of an all arms mechanized combat team. Served as Treasurer, Chair of Parish Council and People's Warden at Grace Church Milton. Served as a Planned Giving Officer for Diocese of Niagara.
- 42/46 Bought a financial planning practice in Belleville. Granted Chartered Financial Consultant designation (CH.F.C.) in 1989. Separated and divorced from Gayle in 1990/91. Practice in Belleville failed due to strain of this and bankruptcy of business partner. Relocated to Toronto in 1993. Attended Beaches Separate Support Group (BSSG).
- 46/50 Joined Leon Frazer & Associates in Toronto as a financial planner. Assisted with programs of BSSG. Started a support group for unemployed mid-life adults, Served as advocate for the unemployed with other organizations, groups and government. Served on the Board of King-Bay Chaplaincy. Helped re-introduce Operation Bootstrap, a support and re-employment program for knowledge workers. Assisted with and conducted Serendipity small groups on Grief, Divorce Recovery, and Mid-Life Crisis. Married Kay in 1994. Appointed Vice President of Leon Frazer Executive Financial Consultants. Attended Discovery (Cursillo) program. Regular participant in 4th Day Group. Member of Advisory Board and Lay Delegate to Synod at St. Crispin's Scarborough. Joined the School of Philosophy in Toronto. Served as a volunteer Tutor. Granted the Registered Financial Planner designation (R.F.P.) and license as a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) in 1996.
- 50+ Read "Halftime: Changing your Life from Success to Significance", by Bob Buford, in 1996. In 1997 Volunteered for service with the India Christian Mission and the Paynter Home for Children in Sri Lanka. Joined Canadian Investment Consultants as a Representative to Canadians resident abroad. Elected to the Board of the Mission. Serve at the Home for several months each year. Accepted responsibility for deputation work outside Sri Lanka. Currently Managing Director of the Paynter Home.