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## Epilogue

“To myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

- Sir Isaac Newton

Contentment is finding value in what must be. As we age, contentment becomes commodity and teacher enjoining us to slow down and suck the marrow from the day. We begin finding pleasure driving in the “right” lane, the “*You can go to hell*” lane of traffic. “If you’re driving behind me and you don’t like how slow I’m goin’.....” The unfolding years have made me more certain of our capacity to recuperate. We’re made with some pretty amazing stuff after all. I’ve also come to realize a few things about myself over the years. Cynically, I’ve learned that, if I ever agree to a mutual suicide pact, it’ll be you first. I’ve also learned that while attempting to avoid the drama, my life continues to expose me as one of those “rage against the machine” kinds of guys. Having something to do with camels and gnats, <sup>i</sup> it’s a character flaw that looks best when dressed in shining armor and given a cause. Warning: while “righteous anger” provides an amazing fuel source it also tends to narrow our perspective, keeping us from many things meaningful in life, energizing those who love us most to master the fine art of walking on eggshells.

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Finally living in peace among family and friends back in Ohio, my spirit will always be in a process of healing. “You’re always rearranging space in your head,” Barbara told me. Essential to the healing in my life she became my wife and greatest encourager for good following my return. She’s right. I seem in a continual state of re-prioritizing. It tends to keep me focused, moving forward in the Invisible Adventures of Joe.

Not a day goes by that I do not think of my old friends from the Church of the Risen Christ. And Larry. I find that I still love the man I thought he once was. For decades I’d secretly hoped he might come to himself at some point, recognize how far off the mark he’d gotten and repent of all the damage he’d done to lives. Lying still to hide his excesses, he’s forgotten what he taught all of us: “whoso covers his sin shall not prosper.” Former church members feel my story is far too easy on him, showing him kindness he doesn’t deserve. The full, monstrous tale of his betrayals against men, women and children in the name of Christ will come out some day but they are far too heinous for these pages. Child molestation, rape and brutality – he was nothing more than a Shadow Prophet – a dark, empty reflection of the real thing. A destroyer of families, his own included, none of his children want anything to do with him, his two sons running away as soon as they were able.

When each of us left the farm everything we had remained behind. That included the music of the All Saved Freak Band. In 1997, I began to notice the growing number of references to ASFB on the World Wide Web as well as bootlegged copies of our old albums being sold around the world. In lieu of any Managerial, Performance or Recording contracts the music was, technically, up for grabs. But too many people paid too steep a price to make that music happen. I had to go back, psychologically, to reclaim the band’s music and legacy. While Larry and I were co-founders, he was the band’s leader by default since he was also Pastor of the church. But that was then, this is now, and I could no longer allow him to profit from our efforts or speak in our name. Attempting to locate former band members and others from the farm, I registered the band name as a legal Trademark, purchased the domain names, obtained signed agreements from members, fought illegal internet sales, released a “best of” CD and responded to Internet authors whose histories mingled fact with rumor. Finally separating the music and legacy from the crimes of one man, the All Saved Freak Band

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is starting to earn its proper place in the history of contemporary Christian music. There is no need for any of us to hang our head for anything.

Though tempered, the idealism that drove much of my life remains. I am yet concerned about our nation. America's current obsession with diversity is yet yielding a cloned society and our naiveté has grown in direct proportion to our embracing of an increasingly "ghettoized" youth culture. Having nothing to do with color, poverty creates its own culture and ghettos are more about the consequences of institutionalized poverty than anything else. Bishop T.D. Jakes said it best: "It's time we forget about the bling-bling, go back to school-school and get some class-class up in here." Cynicism and self-absorption have weakened our collective soul, allowing heroes of a passing moment to chart our course. Losing interest in viewing truth through the panoptic eye of God, we've become the *fauxpourri*, a mingling of all things pretentious such as "do rags" on white guys or people with weaves and false fingernails talking loud about "keepin' it real." The question raised in the 60's by the music of Eugene McDaniels needs asking again: "Tryin' to make it real ... *compared to what?*" We've lost our way and nothing will change until the solution becomes something other than Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum whoring for our votes every four years. We're in trouble and the collective voice declaring the Emperor naked seems to have died with the 60's, leaving our generation to struggle with the consequences of too many disappointed and shattered faiths.

I remain concerned about the Church. While neither called nor qualified to be a critic of Christ's stronghold I do firmly believe that a spiritually connected church *could yet be* a powerful thing. We've lost our taste for candor and have a problem with basic honesty. There can be no growth under such conditions, infection perhaps, but no growth. When we consider that the *percentage* of Christians to global population has been shrinking since the mid-50's, we must conclude there has been no revival taking place. We've been lied to. Had we not lost our focus and squandered away billions on political activism and Christian television, we might have actually changed our world at the grass-roots level. Focus determines reality. More troubling still, the race of those who traffic in the things of the altar is not yet extinguished from the House of God. And no one is troubling the waters.

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I remain concerned about my own soul. "Does your faith remain intact?" is the basic question asked by believers after hearing my story. If, by that, they wonder, "Do you still have warm fuzzy feelings about the Church and Christians in general?" the answer must come back as no. Let me be more specific, *hell* no. Is there not a cause? But, if by that they wonder, "Do you remain accepted in the Beloved?" the answer can only be yes. Though confident I am safe in the Effluvium neither believer nor atheist will own me, and I must leave it to those wiser than myself to justify my profession with my behaviors. Good luck. *"I know in whom I have believed."*

I remain concerned about my family. My babies, are you listening? There is a brightness in each of you sufficiently potent to light up my dark whenever I think of you. Like the life pushing from the root through the branches and into the tender fruit, it is also evident in *your* children. So many treasures, from God's own hand directly to ours. You are in a unique position to awaken a powerful sense of legacy within your own. Connecting yesterday to tomorrow, we are each a critical and irreplaceable part of the family chain -- responsible *to* and blessed *by* something greater than ourselves. Let your children be your "ministry," and have no fear about being fanatical for their good. What shall be said for the person who gains the whole world but loses his own family?

The ancient Hebrew Patriarch Jacob had much of a temporal nature to leave his children when he died. He was, according to historians, Grandson of Abraham and Prince of the blood. The narrative in the Pentateuch declares Jacob to have wrestled with an angel and, in consequence, experience a change in his nature so complete that his identity needed changing. God renamed him Israel, father of the twelve tribes. While his "Jacob" blessing was extensive, dealing with earthly "stuff," his "Israel" blessing was of much greater significance. The Messiah would come and all would be right with the world. My children, there will likely be little to leave you in the way of a Jacob blessing. Sex, drugs, rock-'n-roll and Jesus consumed my years. None of them pay very well this side of eternity. Consolation is found in the fact that I may yet have an Israel blessing, something of life you've seen in me. There is nothing profound about it; you've heard it a million times before, Scarlett breathing it on the ruins of Tara. But true profundity is more often a happy accident of words than the result of any intellectual

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gymnastics. In that hope, my little ones, I leave you the simplest of promises inherited from Jacob and all other broken visionaries. Regardless of the intensity of its terrors or wonders, there is reason to believe that tomorrow really will be better than today.

A little boy sat beside his mother on the front pew at church. The Pastor was preaching and doing very well but missed a few good opportunities to sit down. After about an hour he paused slightly and said, "Finally brethren..." Looking up at his mother the child asked, "What's that mean Momma?" Turning her head to the right she smiled and whispered, "Nothin'." Returning her focus to the Pastor she knew that good endings are tough to come by. And so, I leave you with these, few well-worn thoughts.

In Valladolid, Spain, where Christopher Columbus died in 1506, a monument commemorates his discoveries. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the memorial is the statue of a lion destroying one of the Latin words that had been part of Spain's motto for centuries, "Ne Plus Ultra;" *no more beyond*. Before the daring of Columbus the Spaniards imagined their shores as Land's End, the outer limits of the entire world. When re-sculpted, the lion's paw tore away the first word of the motto leaving it changed as, "Plus Ultra," *more beyond*. There is always, *more beyond*. There is always reason to hope. There is always reason to believe and struggle for the best of things. "Life is best lived by those who live best with what life brings," Lincoln said. Never be afraid to soar and always trust that unique brightness that drives you. I am in there, somewhere, cheering.

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When all my critics have had their full say,  
And all my besetting sins have had their full sway,  
When the cold breath of night kills the last flower of day  
I will yet believe.

Should the moon stop pullin' at the tides of the sea,  
Should the world's hatred fester and spill over on me,  
Should all men be slaves and none be free  
I will yet believe.

When truths long abandoned slip full from my head,  
When faith is long buried in an avalanche of red,  
When hope hangs suspended by its last, dying thread  
I will yet believe.

Should my prayers go unanswered and my flesh come to harm,  
Should the children God gave me lay dyin' in my arm,  
Should no one believe me when I sound the alarm  
I will yet believe.

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<sup>i</sup> "Ye blind guides that strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." [Matthew 23:24]