

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I remembered one day that as a child growing up in Houston, Texas, I tried to commit suicide. I was fourteen and locked in a bathroom with a razor blade. I remembered I drew blood, but there are no scars on my wrists today, so I didn't get very far with my adolescent angst.

I have long since removed myself from the pain of that experience, but not from the impression that God left on me. He came right into that bathroom, sat on the floor, held my hands and smiled at me from the eyes of a young, new Canon of the church, who kissed the blood away and told me that I was special. His name was Park Allis. He didn't try and sell me on God. He sold me on Faith.

That began my relationship with Park and through him I learned to trust in something larger than me. I also learned to pay attention to unlikely messengers in my life.

When I was much older, I traveled back to my birthplace in Chattanooga, Tennessee, for my social "coming out". It was then that I met the next unlikely messenger. She is my cousin, and much, much older.

While driving down the mountain one day, I blurted out that my idea of "coming out" was a little different than hers. I told her I was gay. In retrospect, this was probably for the shock value, but a genuine part of me wanted someone to know. Cousin Flowerree smiled warmly, said "Do tell", and proceeded to ask me questions about what the experience meant for me. She didn't miss a beat in the transition, but also didn't miss the opportunity to talk to me about the perceived conflict with God on that issue. Her gentle humor and guidance kept me ever vigilant about my faith, while my adventures over the years (according to her account) continued to "inspire and educate" her.

It was not until a very dark chapter in my life however, following the murder of my youngest brother in 1982, that I realized the value and import of cousin Fleur's (nickname) influence in my life. While struggling in Boston, Massachusetts, with the memories and monsters of my childhood, during a nine year therapeutic battle to tame those demons, I knew God in the part of my soul that latched onto the image of my cousin, and the unconditional love she had always provided me. It was a constant connection.

Through her, I remembered hope, and through the kernel of hope inspired by her love for me, I found strength, and through that knowledge, the desire to get better, to become "whole". My cousin is now in her eighties. To this day, we are inexplicably bound together in love, and in faith, and when I am lost, as I was in March of 2001, when my baby sister passed after a long and volatile illness, God still calms my soul through her gentle and profound insight.

My relationship with God has been intense and personal, and constant, though never conventional or traditional. He has always known that I needed more than a formal construct of faith and a Sunday sermon to sustain my faith in Him, and in this world. I have learned to expect intangible and unpredictable reminders of His tangible presence in my life.

Long before I began this book, I had a strong sense that I would be called upon to take a different journey, a more visible and vocal one. There appeared to be a global crisis in humanity, and I knew I would not be permitted to just keep my faith in the wings. Shortly after I gave up my career to join the ranks in God's Messenger Corps, the World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks occurred. I knew then, with all I know to be true of my soul, that I was placed in Berkeley, California at an Episcopal seminary for a reason. I needed to develop the skill-set for both the turbulence of the times and the mission.

It has taken twenty-five years of leading a life “against the grain” of convention and commerce to get me on this path. I am not exactly clear on this mission, or what God will require of me during the journey, but I pray I am always available to *Unlikely Messengers* along the Way.

Phyllis A. Travis – Houston, Texas

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