1

Learning to Travel on Life's Mysterious Journey

For most of my early life, all I knew about Cleveland, Ohio, was its nickname: the "mistake by the lake," the place so polluted that in 1969 the city's Cuyahoga River caught fire. In all the years I had driven happily from Chicago or Ann Arbor along Route 80, heading for New York City's George Washington Bridge, I always thought of Cleveland as a strange black dot on the map, stuck up there north of Route 80 on the edge of Lake Erie, a place to be avoided at all costs. But in 1988, the job market called. I was offered a stable salaried position at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. So on June 7, 1988, I piled my family's furnishings into a small U-Haul trailer and drove from Tarrytown, New York, where we were quite happy and I had a good job as a college teacher. I headed for the Coventry neighborhood of Cleveland Heights, wondering just what I had done.

My wife, Mitsuko, and our five-year-old daughter, Emma, were visiting relatives in Japan until August, so I spent that supremely hot and humid summer sleeping on a mat on the

floor of a sweltering top-floor apartment, the refrigerator door wide open in a failed attempt to cool off. I consoled myself with the knowledge that on a good day, with light traffic, it was only an eight-hour drive to New York City.

But I needn't have agonized: our twenty years in Cleveland were great ones. We soon discovered that Cleveland's unique combination of Midwestern hospitality, great culture, and immense creativity suited us perfectly. And we lived a full life there, in the inner-ring suburb of Shaker Heights. Over two decades, bonds of affection grew naturally in a part of the country where community is genuine. We had no tall fences on our block, just low ones that allowed for lots of conversation between neighbors. Sidewalks and neighborhood schools, lively churches and synagogues, block parties and neighborly warmth made love apparent. When new folks move in around the neighborhood, just about everyone pops by with baked goods and a warm hello. There are lots of neighborly places like Cleveland, where friendly greetings like "Hi Jan," "Howdy Ray," and "What's up, Mike?" point to the connectedness that makes people flourish and stay healthy. Clevelanders defend the quality of their community for a reason. It is an exceptionally giving place, and "love thy neighbor" still means something. For twenty years, we were lucky to call it home. We were a family in place, with all the familiarities, routines, and supportive relationships that follow from being in place. Then, regrettably, our comfortable city—where our son, Andrew, had been born; where my mother, who moved to be near us after Dad passed away, had died; and where I had enjoyed a fruitful

career and great local church—was unceremoniously pulled out from under us, like an old rug.

THE BIG MOVE

A few years earlier, I had gotten a new department head, an ardently secular psychiatrist who I could laugh with but whose ideas for the direction of our ethics program in the medical school ran differently than mine. In fact, we were very different in every way—spiritually, intellectually, ethically, temperamentally. But I loved Cleveland, and my life there. Although I was a tenured professor, my job more or less evaporated. It was like sand passing through a big hour glass until it stops. When my boss told me that I could only stick around if I paid 100 percent of my own salary, it seemed like a good time to call it quits. Being an American, I don't work for free and don't think anyone should. It was pointless to stay where I was not wanted. This sort of thing happens in life, and it happens to a lot of people. It just is what it is. My situation was not unique, and life is not ever quite fair. Anyway, I was offered several new jobs, one of which was at New York's Stony Brook University: visiting professor of preventive medicine and director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics—with the freedom to stay and hire new faculty. It was a challenge I was looking forward to. There is something to be said for experimentation with a new environment and new colleagues. Stony Brook has always been known for astonishingly accomplished professors, so I would

feel like a small fish in a big pond and interact with a lot of great folks in New York City. In these ways, a move can be a really creative adventure.

Despite all my good intentions, however, those first months away were by far the worst that my family had ever experienced. Without question, Stony Brook University is a great place, and I had landed in the perfect position. And the setting is beautiful: the north shore of Long Island is lovely, with rocky beaches and hills much like New England, and with the waves and sunsets of the Long Island Sound. But despite the university's many charming qualities and professional advantages, for almost a year following the move I had days when I felt that my life had gotten off track, that maybe I had dropped the ball somehow. At some level, I still wished that I could have done more for Cleveland. Everyone confirmed that I was doing a splendid job in my new position, but I no longer had the rich social fabric and assumed familiarities of two decades—a gift we so often take for granted until we lose it. I felt some natural anxiety about the whole move because that is how humans who have connected well with a former place and community should feel. My wife and son, like me, were struggling with the adjustment. At work, of course, it was my duty to excel and to view my new situation as an opportunity for learning and growth. That was the easy part.

We had sold our house in Shaker Heights before leaving, but we did not do as well as we might have because the market was slowing a lot. No one could have guessed that it

would slow as much as it did a few months later. We jumped into a home near the campus in Setauket, where—like much of New York State—real estate costs are about four times what they are around Ohio. I figured that we had timed the market well and bought at a low, but from August 2008, prices went straight downhill, and nothing had prepared us for the sky-high real estate taxes in New York. Of course one knows about these high costs intellectually, but only with experience does this really sink in. So financial concerns added to our stress, as they do for so many Americans these days. Maybe someday the housing market will come all the way back, but not for a long while. Like many Americans in their fifties who thought they were more or less past any financial worries, I found myself anxious for the first times in years.

Andrew was happy with his life in the Shaker Middle School. He had some good friends, and a first girlfriend. He resented this move deeply, and he let us know through his attitude and behavior. I couldn't blame him. I worried about how the move would affect him, and for the first few months we drove back to Ohio together every four or five weeks so he could visit his friends and take his girlfriend to the movies. This was a good thing because it eased the loss for him and, incidentally, for me. I looked forward to getting off Long Island and out onto Route 80 and the heartlands. I would be singing by the time we hit the Delaware Water Gap where New Jersey ends and Pennsylvania begins. I felt free again. There was good father-and-son chat all the way.

Mitsuko, too, missed Cleveland. At first, she was very excited about moving to New York, where the Japanese shopping is better than it is in Ohio, and where the winters are a little easier. But as soon as we arrived, she began to feel the loss of her friends and her colleagues at the Carol Nursery preschool where she had worked. For better or for worse, I have been the main breadwinner over the years, and Mitsuko has come along as the job market called me—from Chicago to Ann Arbor to Tarrytown to Cleveland to Long Island. As the one stepping into new jobs and work relationships, I have found it a little easier to adjust, at least at first, because I become immersed in my job. Fortunately, the house we bought in Setauket is across the street from the local elementary school, where Mitsuko almost immediately found a paying job helping children with special needs. Studies show how "trailing spouses" frequently volunteer to do community service when they come to a new place. Helping those kids across the street saved Mitsuko in so many ways, and even made me feel somewhat better about buying this now less valuable and overtaxed house.

Our very selves are made up of where we feel most at home. Being in place matters, including all the little intimate details: the river with the perfect waterfall in my favorite Ohio hamlet of Chagrin Falls; a special place to pray early in the morning on the greenest of lawns in front of the Cleveland Museum of Art; a comfortable old chair in the town library; the familiar voices of neighbors and children down the street; a cup of coffee and conversation at the local Arabica

coffeehouse with my old friend Tom; Dr. Robbins, our kind and dependable dentist; and Dr. Vizzy, the physician with excellent listening skills that make her patients feel loved. Cleveland wasn't just any place; it was *the* place we were tied to. Now home was somewhere else, but not really, not yet, and maybe not ever.

Our anxiety was rooted in placelessness, a lost sense of connectedness not just with people and a city that had been good to me but with my own soul and vision. Our minds are so grounded in place and relationship. The idea that our minds are above the world and free like birds on the wing is untrue.

I know that I'm not a special case: a lot of folks in this downturn economy have had to leave their communities under pressure, and feel displaced in many of the same ways my family and I did. Great numbers of people have lost their jobs, and lots more will. They have to go wherever they can to earn a paycheck. Moving is never easy, even when it's a hopeful move; and moving from a place where you feel deeply connected is documented as one of the most stressful things humans can do. Many people report feeling depressed for months—even one or two years—following a move. Some people become clinically depressed. We did not experience this, but my wife and I might have, had we not intentionally helped others as a daily way of life. The facts are clear: such moves rank just under the loss of a spouse as among the chief causes of stress in America, and we are a nation where displacement is the norm for a great many people. We do not give community and stability of place their due. We are always

feeling like resident aliens in a strange land, and are slow to realize that we are creatures who need stable places in order to stay well. The philosophers, like Stony Brook's Ed Casey, have a term for this need: *embodied implacement.*[1]

A number of studies show that when a middle-aged person relocates after laying down roots and becoming part of a social fabric, it takes about eighteen months to adjust and feel normal again; and in many cases, it is really a few years before folks feel fully at home. In retrospect, this was pretty much true for me. For some people it takes less time, and for others a lot more. Some never adjust, and they are unhappy for years. In the literature, the process is usually associated with a period of deep grief that eventually subsides.

Social integration—feeling that one is part of a community, rather than feeling isolated—is a well-accepted key to mental and physical health. More than ten major longevity studies have shown that people who are socially integrated tend to live longer. According to Robert D. Putnam's book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, over the last couple of generations we Americans have lost much of the social glue that once connected us, and we are in danger of becoming a nation of strangers.[2] Social connectedness has been a topic related to health since the nineteenth-century sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote his classic work, *Suicide.* Suicide is very rare in tight-knit communities, more common when connectedness is disrupted. Putnam summarizes the health literature with accuracy: "The more integrated we are

with our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression, and premature death of all sorts."[3] We Americans have possessions galore, but our health is not dependent on what we have so much as on how we live. My heart really goes out to people who are part of companies that require a lot of moving, as though we humans can easily leave one set of friends and circumstances and connect with another whenever necessary, over and over again. We need community, and we need to value community more than we do. The myth of possessive individualism is the beginning of much literal illness.

Displacement is stressful for most people unless one is a natural wanderer who just does not dig roots to begin with, or such an extrovert that rebuilding a social world is as easy as pie. Over the last thirty years, more than a dozen large population studies from different parts of the globe show conclusively that people who are disconnected from others are two to five times more likely to die of all causes when compared to people with close family ties, friends, and community. They have more problems with sleeplessness and are less happy than the socially connected.[4] If you have the choice of moving or staying where you are, don't move before you've really thought it through. If you have no choice in the matter, be aware that you will feel displaced, and treat yourself with great care. And whenever you meet someone who has just moved into the neighborhood, reach out and be a good neighbor. Hospitality to the "stranger" is a precept as old as the Hebrew Bible. It is

especially important because folks on the move are vulnerable. Hospitality creates a friendly space where strangers can enter and find safety.

Big moves—of any kind—require so much soul searching! We all ask a set of similar questions. Who do I want to be? How loyal are we to this place? How do I want people to remember me? Are we going to be happier? Is there a time to move just to not get stuck? Am I abandoning a place and its people? Am I making this choice in resentment or fear? Will I ever get another chance? What impact will this have on my family? Am I willing to take the risk? And once the decision is made and we say, "Of course this was the right thing," at some level we still ask, "Did I really do the right thing?" And the answer can only be, "Well, time will tell, eventually." See, the trouble with life is that you never really know.

What about our health? Family ties, friendship networks, and affiliations with religious groups and social organizations are among the connective tissues of a healthy life. There is absolutely no controversy over these sorts of facts. They are accepted by scientists around the world. Isolation kills, plain and simple. And when we leave a whole lot behind at many levels in a big move, health and happiness are put at risk. I knew these facts cold, and had attended some of the major conferences on social capital theory and health over the years. But still, we had to make the big move.

So it took quite a while to adjust, but with time things did grow easier for all of us, as one would anticipate. We still missed Cleveland, but we learned that yes, we can move

and live through it. Stony Brook University is a great and challenging place full of good and smart people. Mitsuko loves her job, she found a good friend, and she's close to Edgewater, New Jersey, for her Japanese shopping at Mitsuwa. Andrew began to become more comfortable with New York, adopting the Yankees as his hometown team. (Of course to Cleveland Indians fans, like myself, the Yankees are the sports equivalent of the anti-Christ.) The Indians lost a fan, but I was relieved that Andrew adjusted as quickly as he did. He is an extrovert for sure, and has a strong personality.

Yet when you lose the very ground of your being because of decisions made by powers outside yourself, as we did, you experience unambiguous grief. Life suddenly seems both very hard and very fragile. Tensions grow; stress mounts. Ultimately, the experience taught me that bonds of affection, good neighbors, and ultimately, love itself are the most essential things in a happy life. Much is gained and lost in a big move, and it was pretty clear that we had to recreate what was lost as quickly as we could.

RX: HELP OTHERS

So with this move, no matter how I really felt, I mindfully kept a kind heart. We began at home, helping our son adjust to this enormous change in his life. Mitsuko helped her students tangibly, every day. The atmosphere in any medical school is not uniformly upbeat and chipper, so it was my task to uplift people, and I found a lot of meaning and satisfaction in this

task. I consciously tried to listen attentively to everyone and treat people well. At the time, I was doing a little guest lecturing for the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, so I delighted in this little experiment of trying to create a positive psychology in my new workplace.

Each morning I would ask myself, "How can I best love the people I will encounter today?" And I would envision them, their needs, and how I might be supportive of them. Prayer was important. When we visualize things the way they should be, it quickens our resolve to be of benefit to the people around us and moves us into that state of being I call the "giver's glow." Altruistic, loving prayers and meditations are clearly good for those of us who engage in such practices. They galvanize our intentions to enhance the lives of the people we encounter. Around the office, the university, and the local community, I tried my best to serve folks and be supportive of them, and this made things a lot better for everyone and for me.

Although we didn't call it "workplace spirituality," that's what it was. In fact, my best helper, administrator Elisa Nelson, and I have some common spiritual commitments around hospitality and self-giving. We found such value in this. And Iris Granek, the chair of preventive medicine, led a small group in self-awareness with meditation. Together, we created an atmosphere of inclusive spirituality, and that made a big difference.

I also began studying moving from many perspectives—theological, philosophical, political, psychological, epidemiological, sociological, and medical. My work benefited, and

I think I became a more sensitive person in the process. I'm not a proponent of suffering for the sake of suffering, but in my case it became an opportunity to grow.

HEALING IN PLACE

Esther Sternberg, one of my friends at the National Institutes of Health, is a world-renowned scientist who studies stress and emotions in relation to illness and health. Her book *Healing Spaces* is an elegant scientific statement about how important these spaces and places are to happiness, health, and healing. The right vistas, the right sounds, the right architecture, the right colors all have a proven impact in lowering stress and enhancing psychological and physical health. When we are feeling particularly stressed, we can visit such spaces to be alone, to listen to God, to hear the words our own souls are speaking.[5]

We attend a church on Sundays in the village of Setauket, but I try to find sacred spaces everywhere. Stony Brook University is a great school, but it has none of the glorious old sacred spaces that one finds at universities with religious histories, even if they have turned secular over the years. There is no Riverside Church on the street corner like Columbia enjoys, no Rockefeller Chapel like we had at the University of Chicago. If someone from the university passes away, there is no sacred space on campus to have a memorial service. Historically secular schools like MIT have wonderful interreligious chapels that have been built in recent decades to provide

students, faculty, and staff with a sacred space, and perhaps all schools will someday follow suit.

Fortunately for me, I discovered in the university hospital a small chapel about twenty feet square where people of all faiths can bring their spirituality to a quiet place and pray for their loved ones who are ill. To me, it feels like the one spot that is honest about human spiritual needs, and I stop by for just a few minutes on the way to my office most days. Maybe it is only in environments like hospitals, where people and their families are dealing with life and death, that the well-nigh universal call of spirituality must be more openly acknowledged.

Nature, especially, is a good place to find your sacred space. In the historic Stony Brook Village, just past the old duck pond off Route 25A, lies the Paul Simons Nature Preserve. Up the wooded path at the top of a hill sits a beautiful labyrinth where I like to go sometimes to reflect on whether I have been treating difficult people with a healing attitude. On the edge of the labyrinth sits a large rock, about fifteen feet high with a flat vertical face. Climbing up that face is a life-size metal sculpture of a young man, his feet and fingers gripping into the stone where it seems there are no safe or obvious holds to welcome them. The flat rock surface always seems ready to throw the young man off.

I resonate with that young man. It seems as though life is always trying to throw us all off, to let the force of gravity drop us on our backs into the dust of the earth from which we came. Moving put me and my family on the face of a rock for a while, just hanging on. The nature preserve became a sacred

space to me, a place to pause and reflect. I treasure it to this day and walk the paths of the preserve when I get the time.

I found one more sacred place on the ferry that goes across the Long Island Sound from Port Jefferson to Bridgeport, Connecticut. Every month or so, I just like to jump on it and go for a ride. I don't actually get off the ferry because Bridgeport is not exactly a tourist attraction—although I am sure that for many people it is a wonderful home, just as Cleveland became for me. No, I just stay aboard, drinking some tea and having a little Drake's coffee cake, watching the waves and doing some writing. (I have been eating Drake's coffee cakes since I was a little kid.) The round trip takes about two hours, which is a nice amount of time to connect with the sea and get away. Also, because I don't get off, I only have to pay the one-way fare. So this just costs me about $20, a fair price to spend for a day hanging out with the gulls in the fresh sea air.

The ferry reminds me that where we are now is not where we are always going to be. Life is a journey for everyone, and journeys never end.

A DEEPER SPIRITUALITY

I think about things like God's will and its role in how we come to make our choices in life. People often assert, "I know God has a plan." I believe this to be true based on scripture and experience. God has an unseen hand moving behind the scenes of our lives. We are given a good deal of latitude, and when we make mistakes or are adversely affected by the

actions of others, the messes created are not the last word. The worst thing is never the last thing, and adversity is also opportunity. In any situation, no matter how difficult, we are what we think. Every thought we allow and each word we speak literally creates the world around us. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). I am a hopeful person because I do not see that one really has a choice about the matter. We either hope or die, it seems.

Faith matters for me. In fact, through this move from Cleveland to Stony Brook, I have become deeper spiritually. Never has worship, prayer, or doing "unto others" meant more to me than in the context of this move. These have been my emotional center, the place from which creativity, hope, persistence, humility, and love flow.

Love may not be just something between people, but a palpable force that flows from the universe, through us, ever outward. Like many people, I remind myself of this intuition through a daily spiritual practice. When I rise in the morning, which is usually about five, well before quietness gives way to the rush of human activity, I pray and visualize for a bit, usually while sitting or lying down. First, I just concentrate on my breathing and relax. Then I imagine or visualize the events of the day that lie before me, being thankful for all the good things as if they had already occurred. Call this a mental dress rehearsal. It is so important not to be racing around doing things all the time. We need to take time to be grateful for our very being, and to

center our emotions and intentions on doing "unto others" in concern and affection. I know that this may seem like an awful lot of time devoted to spiritual exercise, but it actually seems to slow down my life, giving me more time that is less harried. From this strong, quiet center I become the kind of person who can change the spirit of my environment for the better and create the kind of contagion that allows other people to live better. When I fail to pray and visualize, as can occur on a very busy morning when I have to rush too fast to get started in the right way, the day never goes quite as well. The meaning of life seems to get away from me because I lack focus on it. Intentionality is crucial.

As one who had been much involved in research on spirituality and health for two decades, I know that this prayerful centering on the love of others lowers stress levels, helps with immune strength and healing, and prevents depression. We will never know what such practices do for the ones we pray or meditate for; but for the one who prays or does what my Buddhist friends call "loving kindness meditations," this centering on others rather than on self provides the altruistic orientation to life that is genuinely healthy. We know this from compelling studies of Buddhists who do "loving intention" meditations for others, and we know it from studies of Christians in altruistic or "intercessory prayer" for others. These benefits do not seem to occur if our meditation and prayer are centered on ourselves and our own wants and needs.

FORGIVENESS

During those first hard months, as my son and I drove back and forth from New York to Cleveland along Route 80 in Ohio and Pennsylvania, I couldn't help but think about the Amish, whom we would glimpse from time to time in their horse-drawn carts, or working in the fields. The Amish live in a community in which forgiveness is such a core practice that apology is unnecessary. Of course, we all need to forgive and be forgiven to get through life every day.

I recalled giving psychiatric grand rounds lectures at Penn State Hershey Medical Center two days after a thirty-two-year-old milk truck driver shot ten Amish schoolgirls in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 2006. The gunman took ten young Amish girls hostage, sending all the adults out of the building. The police arrived quickly, but before they could act, the gunman had killed five of the girls and wounded the five others with shots to their heads.

On the very evening of the crime, the Amish went to comfort the killer's family; days later, they attended his funeral. Then they razed the schoolhouse with bulldozers, and in a wonderful communal rite of passage, they built a beautiful new schoolhouse over the course of a few days. It helps to have a community in which forgiveness is encouraged and supported.

The girls were flown into the Hershey Medical Center, which is the trauma center for Lancaster County. I was there,

two days after the event. People in the hallways everywhere were shocked and in a state of silence. In one of my seminars for clinical pastoral care, nearly all the pastors were in tears, but they were also inspired by the Amish traditions and wanted to become better forgivers and reconcilers themselves. The Amish became a model for me then, and I called on that experience as I struggled to forgive my former boss for what I realized was a much smaller loss than the one the Amish had forgiven immediately with elegance and grace.

Forgiving is more complex than giving. We can forgive with tender hearts, but we must be tough minded in order to ensure that destructive behaviors do not run rampant. We become enraged, but forgiveness prevents rage from becoming demonic. Forgiveness is only possible through love. It is the power of love that best pushes aside our bitterness and lifts us above our miseries.

Holding grudges is a terrible way to live. It saps all the positive energy from life and drives us into an emotional dungeon. Nothing interferes with creativity and good judgment more than bearing grudges, and few things have destroyed more otherwise good and promising lives. Forgiveness, difficult as it may sometimes be, makes us stronger, wiser, and happier, no matter what we have lost. From a Buddhist perspective, forgiveness is always possible, and we should forgive always. As Matthieu Ricard has written me, "hate devastates our minds and causes us to devastate others' lives. Forgiving means breaking the cycle of hatred." The Buddhist believes that the basic goodness of a human being "remains

deep within, even if he or she deviates into a very malevolent person." Ricard, an esteemed Buddhist monk of French origins who lives in a monastery in Nepal, underscores that "love is the ultimate weapon against hatred." No doubt, there were a few days when cultivating love was my ultimate weapon, and my ultimate enemy was not that someone who had made my life more difficult, but rather hatred itself. It is like acid on metal over time.

Forgiveness, for me, is one spoke on the wheel of love. Love, an affirmation of the life of the other, and a willingness to participate in that life, is a basic disposition of the self that precedes any of its practical manifestations. Sometimes, we love others *in spite of* themselves, overlooking things in them we do not find appealing. No one has to earn this love. It is a love of radical and "unlimited" acceptance, even if it is also tough love. And sometimes we love *because of* something in others that is appealing. Most of us love people both in spite of and because of themselves, and we hope that those who love us will find at least something special and appealing in us. In real relationships, love is a mix of *in spite of* and *because of*. So maybe we are always forgiving people a bit. If we weren't, we would live in isolation.

The hardest form of forgiveness is self-forgiveness. People have to live with themselves. The trouble is that we are never good enough to really live in comfort. There is that passage from the New Testament, "Call no one perfect." So I have to lean on having already been forgiven by a God with a bigger

heart than we might think possible—a God with a love that accepts us when we cannot otherwise accept ourselves.

ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW

If we hadn't applied the helper therapy principle, this move would have been so much harder than it was, and forgiveness and self-forgiveness would have been tougher. Helping truly does help the helper. Although none of us would have chosen to leave our home and friends in Cleveland, we've all found hidden gifts in this move. Andrew learned that he is a strong, resilient person who can make good friends wherever he goes. Mitsuko and I have also settled in, exploring and embracing our new community and continuing to make new friends. And although we know that deep relationships are built over many years, we have begun sending new roots deep into the soil of Stony Brook and Setauket. I guess we've all learned that we're stronger than we thought we were, that we can find happiness and peace in this place too. Sometimes it's right to be where we are most needed, where we fill the biggest void, and where we can be uncomfortably pushed to grow beyond our comfort zones to once again appreciate the journey. In the Hebrew Bible, people are often pulled out of comfortable places for good things that their limited minds cannot even begin to comprehend at the time. This is what Exodus is all about. Certainly, I reconnected with the fundamental biblical truth that we cannot see ahead well enough to know

how, in God's hands, disaster contributes to destiny, and that God's love can reach down and use even our worst moments for good. Romans 8:28 puts it this way: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to God's purpose."

In the meantime, we can experience joyful moments, know that we can live through the difficult times, and have confidence that we are also being trained for something to be later revealed. Like children finding Easter eggs in the weeds, we can find the hidden gifts of giving, happiness, compassion, hope, and unlimited love amidst the stormy, rock-strewn paths of our most troubled times. We may flounder a bit on big moves, and even feel a little dazed and confused for a while. Like the man eternally climbing that impossible vertical rock face in the Paul Simons Nature Preserve, we may feel in danger of slipping, and we may even fall. But with time, unceasing prayer, and God's love, we can regain our balance and continue on our journey, always moving toward something, always arriving at something new.

James Joyce wrote, "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life." We had not erred necessarily, but we did have to "recreate life out of life."