



The Beginning of Overcoming Fear

by

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January 24, 1995

for

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WC 201

Utah State Univesity



As I was groping around in the vast darkness my mind was contemplating the events that led up to where I was now and to the uncertain events yet to come. "Ouch." I just stubbed my toe on a big rock which was hidden from sight. How many more rocks are there here? I surely hope I do not trip and fall. That would not be a good way to start my weekend adventure. "Whoops". I almost slipped from stepping into an indiscernible crevice on the path. "Are you alright?", amiably inquires my new found friend. "Yeah, I am fine", I respond half out of breath from the enlivened pace we were keeping on this trail in territory foreign to me. I don't mind the pace or the uncertainty of this path. What little I have been able to get to know about Chris assured me of his knowledge and ability to deal with any potential mishaps and of his familiarity of the place where we were going tonight.

I was fresh out of high school when I moved out to Maryland from Arizona. It was in Maryland where I met Chris. In church I spied a young fellow who looked like he was an inactive member, and all the more important, somebody I needed to know. He seemed to represent a lot of who I was, who I wanted to be, and a little of who I was scared of being. His posture was a posture denoting confidence in himself, being at peace with the world. His height was about 5'10" with a medium build. His hair a little longer than the standard missionary or church leader hair cut but not extending beyond his broad shoulders. The eyes, where I always search for what is in the heart, were a light color (I couldn't tell if they were blue or green) showed the peace and confidence that his posture denoted. His garb was simple and casual, he had on a tie, yet his outfit was opposite of the church norm - light colored shirt, dark slacks, dark socks, dark relatively solid tie, and hard leather shoes, usually accompanied with a dark suit coat or sweater.

My heart has always possessed an adventuresome attitude; however, my stomach for any chance of unnecessary pain seemed to zero out the drives of my heart's desire. Although I still have some difficulty with this dilemma at times, I find that overall my heart now wins over my stomach's fear of self-inflicted pain. This I owe in big part to my friend, Chris. He enveloped for me much of what my heart desired in adventure accompanied with the lack of fearlessness I desperately needed.

We decided to go camping one weekend in Maryland at a location only Chris knew about

fifteen minutes from his house. It began, continued, and ended a camping experience unlike any other previously enjoyed. It's simplified nature consisted of little planning and gear. Between we had the bare essentials for camping. We had sleeping bags, a tarp, one mess kit, a knife, a couple layers of newspaper, a few matches, and our cooperative effort of food and water. We prepared our meals (except cooking them) in advance at his house. About an hour later we took off for a short drive to the parking spot Chris had previously picked out. From there we began our hike.

This hike was an experience all of its own. Neither one of us had a flashlight, nor was I familiar with the territory. Compounded with the night being partly cloudy and trees blocking what little available light existed, it was difficult to see where we were going. There were a couple sizable rocks and many crevices begging avoidance along the downward sloping path. What little gear we possessed encumbered our balance. Concentrating on traveling safely, our conversation consisted of little. However, we did pause a couple of times for nature appreciation. The stillness of the night, broken only on occasion by the sounds of a few night creatures, added tranquility to our minds and souls. Appreciation of the earth was enhanced in these moments. Accompanying that appreciation grew a reverence and respect for our duty to take care of her. Of these things did we comment in our journey.

It seemed as though we had been walking at least a mile or two on this path, shrouded in the night forest, before we came to its expectant end. However, the expectation proved falsely hoped for. The path led to a set of railroad tracks on which we bore right. This part of the hike was more visible because we no longer had trees to block out what little light of the sky existed.

"How much longer?" I inquired, now a little exasperated. *Boy, do I need to get out more and exercise.*

"We are about half-way, maybe a little more. Don't worry, we'll get there soon then we can rest." *I sure hope he is right, but just in case, I'll resign to re-pace myself to walk on for two hours more if needed.*

Soon we veered left of the tracks up a hill that a train tunnel was burrowed. Once we groped

our way to the top of the hill, we had to go down into its dip. Sometimes friendships are strengthened just by an occasion to virtually rely totally on a person. I believe this principle surely had hold in this camping experience. I had to rely wholly upon Chris throughout this journey. I felt that I was essentially blind, I could not discern where I was going. We ended up going around the long way to the bottom of the dip to avoid the steepest decline. Which, the next morning, Chris convinced me to slide down avoiding the many trees and getting as dirty as possible with him. This in itself was a feat of overcoming some of my fears and was a predecessor to overcoming one main fear which fulfilled, in part, a youthful fantasy.

It is amazing sometimes the sudden new awareness the morning light can bring after a night dark with uncertainty. Although this principle is implying physical characteristics of awareness and uncertainty in my surroundings, I also contemplated and shared its spiritual significance. The morning light made the descent into the dip seem not so tedious as it was the previous night. A nearby stream offshoot from the river provided a tranquil way to freshen up in the morning after breakfast and before assuming our day hike.

Our day hike resumed primarily on the railroad tracks. Chris related to me a couple of stories when he had previously jumped the train. One of the times he had gotten on with a friend on a coal car in the winter time. They were both very cold even tucked into one of the black corners. The train had picked up speed once they got on so as to make a quick jump back off an unreasonable action. By the time the train slowed down enough for them to jump off it was nearing the end of its travel on the other end of the Chesapeake harbor. They had a dilemma of being a little over an hour away from home.

"That must have been cool to jump a train like that. I am not sure if I had the chance if I would take it. Especially with the chance of not being able to get back off soon after I got on," I replied.

"Oh, most of time you can get right back off without threat of injury. All you have to do is to push yourself away from the train as you jump so that you don't get caught underneath the train in the way of

its tracks," Chris answered soothingly yet with unmistakable enjoyment.

This conversation was then augmented with the sound of an approaching train. "Let's see if we can jump this train," Chris eagerly ventured.

"You're crazy!", astonished yet excited that he would suggest to do just what I had expressed as a fear of doing moments ago. "How would I jump the train? How do I tell if it is going too fast to safely do so?", I continued amused at myself for even contemplating the possibility of following Chris' ventured admonition.

"It's easy! Just look for the side hand rail with a ladder on a car, grab hold quickly with both hands and lift yourself up allowing your feet to rest on the ladder. And I will tell you if it is going too fast. From the sounds of it, I am sure that it is going just the right speed." Chris responded instructively and encouragingly.

"If you want I will let you go first then I can attempt to break your fall if you miss it. Or I can go first to show you and help to pull you up if needed once you grabbed a hold of the bar. Or we can both go at the same time but on different cars. If you go first make sure to quickly scoot over in front of the car with your feet resting near the connectors, so that I can have the necessary room to grab onto the ladder." Chris continued sounding as if both our minds were now assuredly made up to jump the train.

I cannot believe that I am actually contemplating doing this now. But I guess that it is really too late to change my mind. What am I doing? Am I crazy? But then, would I be more crazy jumping the train now when I have the chance to do it with somebody who has done it before thus giving me more assurance that this person will have a greater ability to assist me than if I was to do it with someone else or by myself. Then I would not do it by myself either. I guess I am going to go through with it. If I break my leg or neck then I break my leg or neck. I do need to take some chances to start fulfilling some of my childhood fantasies, do the best I can to avoid a catastrophe by following the instructions Chris has and undoubtedly will still give and hope for

the best.

"Okay Chris, I am up for it, now please repeat the instructions so that I am more sure of what and how I am supposed to do it," I finally replied after contemplating the venture.

"Alright man, don't worry. You will do just fine," Chris answered before repeating the instructions.

"How about you go first so that I can watch and make sure I know by visual example how to do what you have verbally instructed me," I suggested.

The train came. Chris looked for the moment and the car he was to jump as I ran alongside him. He jumped, clinging onto the ladder, lifting his feet, then swinging over to make room for me to jump on. I continued to run alongside it for a moment before I made the leap and grab. My heart was racing twice as fast as it should have been for the running I was doing. Even when my hands successfully grabbed on and Chris took hold of my wrists to help me lift myself up to place my feet on the ladder, my heart felt like it was leaping out of my chest. I didn't experience a slowing of the heart rate, my excitement, fear and anxiety until we were both safely tucked inside the coal car. A big smile of relief, fulfillment, and satisfaction came over me and released me from the physiological effects of my fear. Chris and I both gave out a joyful laugh of relief and accomplishment.

Not too long after this the train slowed down to a practical stop. We were not sure why it stopped but wanted to make sure we were not found if it was because we were spotted jumping the train. So we quickly got off and bolted for the trees of the forest. From hence we resumed our hike feeling a little closer to each other and a greater appreciation for life as we had just endangered ours.

This was one of the first childhood fantasies that I was enabled to fulfill and enjoy with my friend Chris. This also symbolized the beginning of overcoming my fears of self-imposed physical pain caused by a venture into some physical activity.