

For my children

“So live your lives that your children can tell their children
you stood for something wonderful.”

– anonymous

Prologue

“Our rendezvous is fitly appointed.
God will be there and wait till we come.”

~ Whitman

Disdaining the warning of Nietzsche, I've “*looked long into the abyss*” without being careful to keep the abyss from looking long into me. There is always a price to pay for such voyeurism. You forget who you are. You lose your identity. You become a Shadow-person, a Whisper-man, someone of no substance, never quite certain about who you really are. “Shape without form, shade without color, paralyzed force, gesture without motion;”ⁱ Having mapped that Land of Nightmare I can say with some confidence that there is no light at tunnel's end of true darkness. Indeed, one may look so deeply into the void they can feel the pull of Insanity's Event Horizon. Lost is a bad place to be.

The only thing that will give this work any value is its uniqueness and honesty. Only a fraud attempts to quarry from his life curios that time and experience have not buried within it. To write anything less or more than the truth is to use, as Thoreau said, “torpid words, wooden or lifeless words that have a paralysis in their tale.” Consequently, much of what is herein committed to paper and ink causes me embarrassment, shame and downright humiliation. There is no dancing on the rubble. I expect the religious community and those few people who hold me dear to feel somewhat uncomfortable as the story unfolds. So be it. The best stories do more than simply soothe, distract or entertain. The best stories are those that awaken reflection within us, that stir us to self-examination and challenge us to become better creatures.

Placing blame on none, this work is an indictment against myself. All other evils are but supporting cast. Timeline purists will record that I have freely shuffled the deck of years making sequence subject to story. "Scrutinologists," such people cling to the minutia for warmth. But history is a tricky business. We tend to see it from the angle in which our light shines upon it. Others will shine a different light and see from a different angle. Let them write their own book.

From the materials life provides us, each will build *something*. Some are born into an environment of unlimited potential. Members of the Lucky Gene Club, life appears to have dealt them "a good hand" and the materials with which they build their lives are second to none. Others are born into environments more painful than pleasurable, the materials for building a life proving less than desirable. Each will build *something*. It is neither mandatory nor voluntary. It is inevitable. However, the quality of materials provided need not dictate the quality of the final product. In the end, the quality of our lives need not be a reflection of the materials with which we began if, somewhere along the line, we focus on the foundation. The foundation determines what can be done with the materials. One of the problems with neglected foundations is that the degree of the defect cannot be perceived accurately until a storm comes. It's in the storm that the quality of the foundation is revealed. In the sunshine of life one house is as good as another - one philosophy, religion, creed as good as another. But, when the storms come, when Euroclodon bears down on us when, as Hendrix said, "there ain't no light, nowhere," then neglected foundations are discovered to all. They are often discovered in the choices of our lives.

*Pain, which cannot forget,
Falls drop by drop until,
In our own despair,
against our own will,
Comes wisdom through the awful grace of God*

~ Aeschylus

ⁱ T.S. Eliott, The Hollow Men