

Emancipation of the Soul

— for Robin

“The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off.”

— James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

It shames me to think of how many suns have risen and fallen without making a token gesture of gratitude to those who have helped shake my dungeon. And you Robin are one of those people. It was this time last year when a hurricane of insanity picked me up, held me and violently threw me to the ground. Like a fool I tried to walk when I could barely stand. At the time I associated with a group of people I blindly considered my friends. But when the dust settled from that mighty hurricane, only a few people stayed around to help me find my legs. The people I am talking about are you, Mark, and Mike M.; I am certain each has helped me in very different ways. I am equally certain you have helped me the most.

This past summer an extremely unique opportunity presented itself to me. I use the word “opportunity” loosely here. Robert Frost wrote, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

I hope you recall the time when we went to Buckhead’s to eat and I called you a bitch. I laugh now at the stupidity of that moment, which was entirely my fault. More importantly I shared a great sorrow of being molested by a neighbor. This man called my father at his office this past summer. My Dad’s secretary took a message and he came home to tell me about this intrusion into our lives. A new road was beckoning me, but standing in my way was an old haunt. My options were to nervously stand by and wait for him to call again or call him back. This was not the first time he had called my Dad since the knowledge of his actions caged my soul. Years have past since I was sixteen. In those days the chains of fear were wrapped tightly around my neck. Once I was timid; fear had placed me in spiritual bondage.

I started to rationalize reasons for not calling, but realized that God was giving me my chance for redemption. Redemption in some context implies blame, but it also means an end, which is the meaning I prefer to convey. So I decided to call this man who introduced fear, rage and violence into my life many years ago.

The number of reasons for calling were great. However the primary reason for calling was my father’s demeanor. I know that both my parents felt an irrational guilt over what had happened to me as a child that had eaten away at them just as fear had eroded my perception of self. There were other reasons for calling, but the urgency I heard in my father’s voice when he asked me what I was going to do was reason enough.

I vowed not to fling accusations before I called which would be denied and lead to circular argument. All I wanted to do was make sure this man would never call on my family again. I was terrified and would either be freed or mercilessly crushed depending on what transpired.

My father sat down beside me on our deck outside to listen to the conversation. When I dialed the number, I focused my mind, ready to play a chess match that would determine so much.

“Is Herb there?” I asked.

“Yes, hold on. May I ask who’s calling?”

“This is Eric Cecil.” My voice was calm, like I wanted it to be. I did not want my emotions to betray me.

“Hello, this is Herb.”

“Hi, Herb. This is Eric Cecil, it has —”

“Oh hi, Eric. How have you been?”

The nerve he had to inquire about my well-being shocked me, waking a dull sleeping rage.

“I’m fine,” I said calmly, “But you and I need to talk. I am speaking on behalf of my father as well as myself. We do not want to have anything to do with you. You are not to contact us again. We don’t want you to write or call.”

His reply was as cool as a late October day. “I was trying to call Dave Cecil today, an old neighbor of mine.”

Listen motherfucker you know exactly who I am, and if you don’t acknowledge me right now, I’m jumping through this phone to rip your fucking head off.

I said, “This is his son, Eric.”

“Oh.” He sounded like a doctor had told him that he had cancer. “You all don’t want anything to do with us.” He referred to himself and his wife.

“That’s right.”

“Okay.”

Silence: I hung up. The call had taken less than a minute.

You maybe wondering why I was troubled for so many years. I was afraid I was wrong about being molested. Time had caused self-doubt. I still do not know exactly what happened. I knew something had happened and that that was all that mattered. When told not to call or contact my family, he said okay rather than ask why. He knew why, and he knew I knew why.

I needed that okay. It confirmed what I knew. I once believed that the truth I sought would come only through death, through reconciliation with the spirit of my great-grandmother. My parents dropped me at Herb’s house because my great-grandmother had journeyed on to the world after this one. She died that day, my sixth birthday, April 30, 1983, imprinting the day onto my being, her final gift that of remembrance.

I found myself walking a new road the morning after my conversation. This road has always been there, but fear and doubt had formed an impossible roadblock to get past. The only reason I am now traveling is through the power of love. My heart breaks when I think of the love you have always given me, but when we first met I was not ready to give back. I could go into the times when I should have returned your love. It pains me to think of those instances. But I do remember.

Greek thinkers pondered the meaning of Love, and they came up with three different kinds: Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros is the physical attraction between two people. I was filled with Eros based on the way you looked when we first met and upon your moxie. You have a humor that few women have been blessed with. This blend still leaves me at times at a loss for words. I am amazed by you. I was chained with fear and doubt which crippled my love based on Eros. However, time transformed the fleeting love of Eros into the love of Philia which now allows me to honestly express to you these feelings that have become another

cross to bear. I have placed this cross on my back because I have not had the courage to tell you how I feel. As I write a feeling of liberation has come over me.

Philia is an open, lasting love. It is the love of brothers and sisters, of husbands and wives. It is based on honesty and trust. Philia is the love you showered upon me in my time of need. I have taken more love from you than I can repay. You might not believe this, but I do. There were days last fall when depression threatened my existence. A great deal of the love that helped sustain me during that time came from you. You provided the warmth and light that eventually led me to a new kind of love.

This new love is what the Greeks call Agape. Agape is a love that gives without thought of reward. It is a love God bestows upon men and women so they may overcome great difficulties and endure staggering losses. God gives this love, but there is always choice. And with this choice one road divides into two. One of these roads is paved with bitterness, fear and hatred. Materialism, power and avarice light the desolate night. There is never peace or silence: cries, screams and the sound of unspeakable horror pierce the stagnant air. At the end of this road is heartache, sorrow and emptiness. Dishearteningly, there are many people eager to start upon it.

I have started down the path that is less traveled. And Robin, you should never underestimate that your love helped place me on this road. You are very treasured.

I questioned God for so long instead of accepting. I denied and by denying, I now know my soul would never have the freedom to bask in the sunlight of love that shines down upon all of us. I now understand that love is not a stagnant pool of water, but a mighty river that shapes and creates what it touches.

You may be wondering why I choose to express my love and gratitude to you. I have selfish reasons of course. One is that I know the expression of these thoughts and feelings are overdue. I also know that time has grown precariously short. I will graduate in a year and a phone call to you will likely involve a "1" and an area code. I don't believe Lexington fits into my future. But the overwhelming reason I write is to tell you I do love you, which I hope you know by now. I hope that if your perception of me changes after reading this, it's for the better.

Love always,
Eric