

Enlightenment Behind Bars

Compiled by Theresa Crabtree

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ISBN: 979861545915

First Printing: August 23, 2021

Published by Theresa Crabtree

Photography and book design by Theresa Crabtree

Cover photo: ISCC, Boise, Idaho

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PREFACE

My prison ministry began on July 19, 2011 when I began to send donated copies of my first book, *Mayan Messages: Daily Guide to Self-Empowerment*, to prison libraries. To date, over 1100 prisons have put this book on their shelves. Within its cover was an announcement, similar to this book, inviting incarcerated people to write for a free copy. Ironically, as I type this, 1,234 incarcerated people have received a free copy of the book. 1234... and so the numbers grow. As a result, I began to correspond with several who I have befriended through the years.

As expected, over time, the library copies began to disappear and the number of requests began to dwindle. Thus, I had the idea to reconnect with the prisons in order to restock the books. As usual, Spirit had another plan up its heavenly sleeves.

The idea came to create two more books to donate to prison libraries and incarcerated people and likely, more to follow. The premise of *Enlightenment Behind Bars* was to create a self-paced workbook full of spiritual lessons and practices. However, this time, the authors were to be inmates, sharing their knowledge with other inmates and free citizens.

I immediately “knew” there would be ten authors. Ironically, three who I was intuited to invite had drifted away and we had not corresponded for around two years. That very morning, two of them emailed me “out of the blue.” That was confirmation I was on the right track! However, the plot thickens; there was one last person that I had not heard from in a couple of years. I typed up a submission guideline letter to send to everyone I was inspired to invite and took them to the post office, including one for him. I don’t know why I was surprised to see a letter from him in my postal box that day... but there it was.

The guideline submission letters were sent out to the invited inmates in January of 2018. My initial concern was that several of them would write on the same topic. I was aiming for diversity and that is exactly what they delivered, with no intervention from me. I figured that putting this book together was going to be a piece of cake and that it would happen fast. What I didn’t expect was that people serving “time” in prison, often have very little free time. It has taken over three years just to gather the initial drafts from these ten writers. To soothe myself, I ate a lot of pieces of cake in the interim.

Happily, the reason for the slow up for several of them was due to their release from prison. As I write this, five of the authors have been released. I don’t expect anyone to have time to sit and write as soon as they are released from prison, so patience has been our guide. Some would have liked to contribute more, but “time” on the outside is just as pressing as “time” on the inside.

One of the biggest challenges some of us faced was a new policy issued by the Department of Corrections (DOC) in some states. They cracked down on their mail policy, not allowing printed material in. That means those authors had to hand write their manuscripts and snail mail it to me. Then, I would have to hand write back any suggested edits. Then they would have to hand write back their next edits. Very time-consuming. When you’re in prison, paper, pens, stamps and envelopes cost as much as gold on the outside. This wasn’t too big of a problem with the others who had limited email access. Although it is pricey, we could copy, paste and send images back and forth for editing.

However, that luxury was short-lived. At the same time, the DOC in some states decided to change their email service, using the worst one on Earth! This service is severely limited, allowing only 2000 characters per email. We could no longer send images for editing. Worse yet, it is time sensitive and will shut off the service in just a few minutes. If you didn’t finish your email in time, it self-destructed. There was no ability to copy and paste. Just one lesson may take a dozen or so virtual stamps, due to the limited number of characters per email.

Keep in mind, that incarcerated people who do have access to this type of email service often have to wait in line in a non-private, noisy area. In addition, it is costly. As a result, one of the ladies had to drop out. Anastazia was only able to get one lesson to me, in pieces, over a series of weeks before she won the court case that resulted in her immediate release. Scott resorted to snail mail. The project eased up the following year when their state’s DOC mail restrictions were considered unconstitutional.

Communication was just as bad in Pennsylvania. Due to so many mail problems, this prison decided to hire a mail service to inspect inmate mail. The service they hired is in Florida, so all correspondence is mailed to Florida. If it passes inspection, then it is mailed to the prison in PA. That takes a bit of extra time. To make matters worse, Joe hesitated on mailing his submission and unfortunately, during that time, DOC staff did a cell search and threw his manuscript in the garbage! I can't imagine his frustration. It took him a couple of months to get motivated, but happily, he did a rewrite and got it safely mailed to me. Luckily, he is an excellent storyteller, so very little editing was needed.

The greatest joy I have received from this book project is the enthusiasm and the spiritual growth that each of these authors has experienced during this time. A few have been sitting on their knowledge, afraid to let their Light shine while in prison. Each of them is now more empowered and encouraged to let their Light shine brighter. A couple of them are not writers, so it was a bit challenging for them in the beginning. Each soon found their voice and perhaps surprised themselves with their newfound gift. On the opposite spectrum, some are prolific writers and storytellers, making it hard for them to decide what to write about. Hopefully, we will soon see them creating their own books!

Do keep in mind that myself and each of the authors may not fully agree on what the others have written. The purpose of this book is to offer you their insights and beliefs that may or may not resonate with you. The hope is that you will feel inspired to read what they share, do your own research and then decide what you believe, as a result.

Life is a step-by-step adventure, so enjoy each path that you walk. Be open-minded and see diversity as a blessing rather than a challenge. We are all creators. Trying to mold everyone into the same little box is like asking Michelangelo to paint by numbers. Boring!

I do hope that you enjoy what you read and that it helps you to expand your self-awareness and seek more information from the endless source of possibilities that lay before you.

Many blessings,

Reverend Theresa Crabtree

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am ever grateful for the experiences, knowledge and love that has been showered on me by these ten authors. I cannot imagine what it would be like to spend years in a prison environment. I get grumpy when one little thing annoys me. Yet each of these individuals, while spending 7 to 36 plus years behind bars, not only managed to find and maintain their sanity, they were also able to go within and discover their spiritual roots. Each of us originally connected when they requested a free copy of my book, *Mayan Messages: Daily Guide to Self-Empowerment*.

Anastazia was the first to write to me, in October of 2012. “Go-getter” is just one term to describe this ambitious artist, writer, activist, teacher, counselor, playwright and researcher. She always has several projects going and can’t get enough when it comes to education. She has also been interviewed on several internet radio programs. While incarcerated, pressing against all odds, Anastazia pushed her way through the courts, winning her freedom in 2019 after 18 years of incarceration. Even the DA that prosecuted her had favorable words upon her release, “Whereas most offenders stand before a judge and pledge to make the most of prison programs to change their lives, she proved it.” I have been impressed with her and am excited to see how she applies her many skills as a “returning citizen.” Regretfully, due to communication obstacles, court prep and her unexpected release, she was only able to get one lesson completed. I am also including part of a radio interview that was aired a few days before her release.

Joe was the second of these writers to contact me, in January of 2013. We hit it off right away. We both have an interest in the Native America path, the “Red Road.” We both are proficient with the gift of gab, storytelling and love of writing. Some of our letters were more like booklets. During this time, he was reunited with his birth family, having been adopted when he was young. It was then that he discovered he had Cherokee in his bloodline. Could it be his Ancestors were “calling” out to him, thus creating his interest in the Red Road?

Joe has enjoyed working as a carpenter and being part of the dog training program. He also spent many years in the “classical” prison job, making car license plates. He recently was turned down for parole, his first chance of freedom in 36 years. Yet, he is hopeful that he will be released next year, with the intention of helping to run the family cattle ranch.

Carl was the next to show up, making initial contact in March of 2013. While in prison, he also was part of the dog training program and planned to return to his home state to continue this work. However, he was blessed to discover the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) upon his release in California. Many unexpected doors of opportunity opened as a result. His love of singing and heart-felt song-writing found him spending much of his time at open mics. Happily, we were geographically in the same area during his second home visit and we enjoyed a delightful lunch together. He shared how he creates personalized jewelry based on the person’s astrology and personal interests. Brilliant idea!

I teared up watching the first few videos he posted online. He was walking down the street, offering his infectious smile as he greeted everyone. He was expressing gratitude for everything, while stopping to enjoy the beauty and smell of the flowers. Things that most of us ignore or take for granted, become priceless when you’ve been away from them for 18 years. He met, then married, the love of his life soon after his release.

Richard was the fourth to connect with me, in June of 2013. After he received the *Mayan Messages*, he wrote a short note of gratitude and included a greeting card of a young boy holding up a girl, with her arms stretched upwards, with the caption, “Reach High.” I immediately taped the card near my computer, where it remains to this day.

Seven years passed with no correspondence between us. On July 26, 2020 as I was putting the final touches on this manuscript, “out of the blue,” I received a letter from Richard. He asked if I still had the card and also mentioned that he was working on several manuscripts. I quickly responded, inviting him to submit some of his writings for this book. Within three weeks, he sent everything you will read in his section!

Scott showed up fifth, in August of 2013. He constantly wrote about his vision for a class he wanted to present in prison, Enlightenment 101. But year after year, it remained just that, a vision. It is my hope that now that his writings are being published in this book, that he will find the courage to move forward and share his spiritual

views more openly. One of the saddest things about life in prison is how much people dim their Inner Light since prison is not a safe environment to share your heart or to be vulnerable.

Mark was the sixth to request the Mayan Messages in September of 2013. His letters were short and to the point. Right from the beginning, he expressed his interest in metaphysics, with the dream to attend the Barbara Brennan School of Healing upon his release. Soon after his release in 2018, he reunited with an old high school flame and they married in July of 2020. Barbara's school may not come to fruition, but he is still moving forward with his spiritual goals. He recently completed a series of Reiki healing courses and now is working as a barber.

Damon was seventh on the scene. We hit it off very quickly, having much in common, including being born during the sign of Pisces. We enjoyed experimenting with long-distance ceremonies on the Full and New Moon. This eventually grew into the Celestial Gatherings that I still host online. The day I went to the post office to mail letters of invitation to write for this book, I had a strong intuition to write a letter to Damon and invite him, even though we had not been in contact for two years. Imagine my surprise when I opened my mail box and sitting there was a letter from him!

Needles was eighth on the scene, showing up in November of 2014. Although we didn't correspond very often, during the past six years, he encouraged dozens of incarcerated people to request a free copy of the Mayan Messages.

He was released in the fall of 2019, in uncharted territory, not where he had expected. A few days later, with a little jingle in his pockets saved during his seven years in prison, he hit the streets. Stop for a moment, close your eyes and think about what you would spend your first few dollars on, if you were just released after a long prison stay. I would probably hit the candy store first. Not Needles. He roamed the streets on the hunt for used book stores. However, the books weren't for him. He was buying spiritual books to send to those who were still incarcerated! Whoa! That impressed me! We share a common goal, putting spiritual literature into the hands of Seeking inmates.

Marshal contacted me on April 7, 2020. He shared that he was teaching a class on Native Americanism and was requesting the Mayan Messages in hopes of sharing the information with the guys in the Circle. While Joe was writing about the Red Road Grandfather Teachings, I was looking for someone to share other aspects of the Red Road. So, in September of 2020, I wrote to Marshal, asking if he received the Mayan Messages and if he wanted to participate in this book.

Nearly three months later, I received a response. Turns out that in August, he had been transferred to a medical prison facility. Upon discharge, in November, he was transferred to a new unit. He shared that he had received the books on his birthday in April and both of the letters that I had written to him. That in itself is a miracle because prisons are notorious for not forwarding mail. It was an added bonus to find out that as a teen, he had been trained to become a "Medicine Man."

Darris initially wrote to me on July 9, 2020. He told me that about two years prior, he mysteriously received a copy of my book Mayan Messages from amazon.com. Neither of us knows who sent him that copy. In the letter he wrote, "I reached the deepest level of meditation I've experienced while reading your book. It changed the fabric of my thoughts. I believe the Universe sent me exactly what I needed, and it wouldn't be the first time."

The reason he was writing, was to request that I send him another copy of the Mayan Messages because during a prison transfer, he was told he had too many books, and the prison staff confiscated his original copy. After I sent a new copy, I wrote and asked him to let me know if he received it and asked if he wanted a free copy of this book when it came out. When he wrote back, he included two of his journal entries. I was impressed with his writing and invited him to submit some lessons for this book. I am reminded of the saying "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." Darris mysteriously received the Mayan Messages and it was taken away before he finished reading it... just in time for him to connect with me and be part of this book!

I hope that you enjoy getting to know each of these writers as you read what they share with you, heart to heart.

Blessings,

Reverend Theresa Crabtree

INTRODUCTION

Each section of the book highlights the writings of one of the ten authors. First, is a short biography of their life experiences that led to their spiritual awakening.

The next segment of each section contains practical, spiritual lessons that are a reflection of their current understanding of reality. You are asked to study their words and contemplate their meaning. You are encouraged to do further research before taking on these words as part of your belief structure.

After the lessons, each author has included spiritual practices that have been of benefit to them.

Appendix A: As a bonus to you, I have included “Daily Spiritual Practices” that have been of great benefit to myself and my clients. I hope that you will find them to be of value, as well.

Appendix B: Each author was encouraged to share a Recommended Reading list. Since there were so many overlapping books, their suggestions have been combined into one list. These books have been arranged alphabetically, by title.

Appendix C: Here you will find a list of Resources for Incarcerated People. Several of the books from the Recommended Reading list may be obtained freely. Check the section “Free Books for Incarcerated People” for further information.

ANASTAZIA SCHMID

Anastazia is an artist, poet, activist, and PhD student in Ethnic Studies. She blends her knowledge and artistic expressions in her work and contributes her time and talents to numerous charitable, activist and outreach causes.

She is a founding member of the Indiana Women's Prison History Project, a research team engaged in re-writing the history of women's prisons and institutions. Her area of emphasis is nineteenth century gender and sexuality: the history of gynecology/obstetrics, medicalization of women's bodies, sex work, epistemic injustice, violence and trauma.

She is co-author of the play *The Duchess of Stringtown*. She also works in collaboration with Abolition Journal Collective, IDOC Watch anarchist collective, the Lumina Foundation, National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Constructing Our Future, Focus Re-Entry Initiative, Silent Cry, Inc., CAT-911, Underground Scholars, and Memento Mori Paranormal History Hunters.

CARL “OOOH BAY” ROBINSON

My spiritual journey began in the alternative reality dream world where we often get our messages of truth when we are not listening to life. In that dream, a loved one came to me with writing on the wall; writing that I could not understand, in a language that I did not know and had not seen before. I later discovered this writing came from the holy Islamic book, the Quran. I then begin studying Sophie mysticism which led me to Christian Gnosticism. This led me to Buddhism, which led me to study Confucianism and Shamanism. I have also studied Rosicrucian ideology and practice a personal form of Neterianism.

I am a traveler and Magi.

A Libra, born in the year of the snake, a Florida native.

Singer-songwriter, blending trap, Southern Country, lyricism, Rock and old folk storytelling into mind-opening, heart-moving, body-shaking songs.

“A new life” is my motivating model, discovered after transmuting my mind to higher levels of expression.

“Adapt or Die,” the Creed of a Man who became more than a thug serving an 18-year prison sentence.

“The Sun Returned Home” pours out memories of life in a soul-stirring raspy voice, adding heart to any track he is on.

OooH Bay performs weekly as a Spoken Word Artist at various venues, known to capture the essence of a culture and sing it into life with soul-moving, crooning and inspirational verse.

As Carl Robinson, Oooh Bay is the Founder and Manager of SoKuL Body Wear, a hand-crafted designer jewelry limited liability company.

Additional positions include:

Treasurer for the Creative Alliance (Artist Club).

Executive Director for Black Zebra Productions, Inc.,

a non-profit organization that funds artists who need resources.

Member of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC),

a non-profit organization that assists in reducing the prison population.

MARK RICHARDSON

Hello, I am Mark Richardson, also known as Shaggy Doo. I was raised in a Mormon family and from a young age, I realized this wasn't for me. My home life wasn't great as my father was very abusive to me and my siblings. He was abused himself as a child and later developed dementia and mental illness brought on by cancer. My mother was great and the epitome of unconditional love.

My entire life, I've always been a bit of an outsider. I never fit in with the "in crowd" at school and was often bullied and picked on for being different. Being the odd one out usually leads to one of two paths. The positive path leads to getting involved in things that help you in the long run, such as joining the math club, getting skilled as an artist or because of lack of friends, spending time at home studying and getting good grades, which helps you get into a good college.

One may choose the negative path, like I did, where you begin associating with other unfortunately damaged kids and getting introduced to substance abuse, skipping school, becoming involved in petty crime that eventually grows into serious crime. At worst, leading to violent acts, putting oneself and others in danger of injury or death, as we've seen lately with the rash of mass shootings.

I began using various drugs at age 13, eventually becoming severely addicted to methamphetamine. Around age 21, I began using meth intravenously. By 24, I came up with the idea to rob a bank to support my drug habit. That idea got me convicted of Armed Robbery and caused me to spend half my life in prison. Not my best choice.

While sitting in prison, I realized that I needed to do something to fix my life. At that point, I had a moment of clarity and knew my life and way of thinking needed a complete overhaul. I became the person embodied by the saying, "I didn't get arrested, I got rescued." I decided to get clean from drugs and have not done any dope since.

I also began searching different religions and spiritual philosophies, going through the rolodex of religious thought. I began with the study of born-again Christianity, eventually converting. However, I had a problem stomaching the black and white thinking that most traditional religions promote. The theology usually comes down to, "I am right and you are wrong, therefore, I must convince you of that so I don't have to examine my own life and face what is wrong with it." When I realized this, after a few years, I decided to drop the façade and began a true search of my inner self and began to study different philosophies and books on psychology and various religions.

I studied Christianity, Judaism, Satanism, Palo Mayombe, Santeria, Setian, Left and Right-Hand Path and Hermeticism, to name a few. I discovered that the one thing each one had as a core principle was Love, so I followed that, even though it was expressed in different ways. After that realization, I only had eyes for the love principle and accepted that from every tradition. I used that to build my own personalized, eclectic tradition which has developed into one of compassion, holistic health and healing of self and others. Happily, it feels like home. My life goal is to create my own professional healing practice and ministry. I spent too many years taking from others. Now I want to give back for the rest of this life, being an instrument of healing and teaching.

In 2018, on my birthday, I was ordained as a Reverend through the Alliance of Divine Love. The following month, I was released from prison after 22 years of incarceration. In October of 2019, I graduated from Barber school and two months later, I became a Reiki Master. In 2020, I married a woman whom I very deeply love. She has been the greatest blessing I've ever experienced and to whom I owe everything...

MARSHAL McWILLIAMS

First, let me thank God, my Father, my Creator for letting me be. If it was not for Him, I would not be where I am now in my faith, walking the Red Road.

See, I'm blessed from two worlds, not only the Christian side, but also from my Native American side. My mother always said, "You were born about a hundred years out of time. You should have been born a hundred years ago." I never understood what she meant, until I was older.

As lots of boys my age, I liked the outdoors, usually preferring to be by myself. After twelve years of boyhood trouble, my great grandmother said that I needed to learn about my heritage. "Send him to Manuel," she told my mother. I wondered why they were sending me and not my big brother. The connection was not made until I was introduced to Manuel and who he was. I was really fascinated with Manuel. He was a real live Indian and a medicine man, at that. Magic! Or so I thought at the time.

From 1978 until 1982, I learned many things from Manuel. I learned more about what it is to be human than to be an Indian. Yes, there is a difference. You must experience it to know.

In November of 1982, Manuel said he had to go to the Tribal Council and wanted to take me to meet them, and to see how Tribal Affairs were handled. So off we went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma territory. After being introduced to the Council members, they started asking me questions pertaining to what Manuel had been teaching me. The topics were on plants, animals, spiritual understandings and what I would do or say in specific situations. Most of these topics had become second nature to me.

After answering questions for what seemed like forever, I was shown out. Waiting on Manuel seemed like another eternity. When he finally showed up, there was a lady with him named Morning Star. She handed me a paper wrapped with a ribbon, with an attached wampum strip [beads made from shells] and feather. She told me if I ever needed anything, all I had to do was ask. I figured this was the usual statement she made to everyone. I was wrong.

Later, after reading the paper she had given to me, I realized why Manuel had presented me to the Tribal Council. In attendance had been a member of each of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. The paper indicated that I had passed the test to become a recognized shaman or holy man. Manuel had been training me for this work without me knowing it. What a thrill! I was stunned and I was excited. I had so many questions, but didn't know where to start.

I had been accepted under Cherokee Tribal status as a Holy Man. I now understood why Morning Star said that I could ask for anything I needed. Tribes take care of their spiritually chosen. The chosen are respected, no matter where they are on their path.

I was given the name "He Who Walks at Night." That came about since a lot of times I would walk home in the dark to visit my family. During the summer and any spare time I could get, I stayed with Manuel.

Two months later, Manuel passed away. I was mad, hurt and lost. My teacher, my friend, my confidant... gone. No one understood me or what I was going through. My family was already torn apart by my father's incarceration for drugs. I left my spiritual studies behind; I didn't want to be reminded of Manuel. I dropped out of high school to work. I still did my school work, I just didn't attend school. I would take two hours a day after work to do school lessons and my mother would turn them in for me...

JOE KINNEY

Hello friends,

My name is Joe Kinney and my spiritual journey began after several years of incarceration for crimes which I did, regretfully, commit.

I was born Joe Foster and I was placed into the care of Children Services at approximately one year of age. I was adopted into the Kinney family at four years of age. It was a few years later that my adoptive father began to physically and mentally abuse me. At the age of eight, I attempted suicide twice and was eventually diagnosed as manic depressive with bipolar tendencies. I later discovered that the diagnoses were incorrect. I was simply having a great deal of trouble dealing with my emotions.

In 1984, at the age of 19, I made my way to Pennsylvania with a friend. I had no intention of committing any crimes, but my self-esteem was low and my morals and values were really messed up. It only took a small amount of fear for me to start making one bad choice after another, until I was arrested and sentenced to a prison term of 34 – 68 years.

In 1988, still making bad choices, I escaped from prison, only to turn myself in within 24 hours because I realized that in order for me to stay out, I would have to commit the same or worse crimes than what I originally committed in 1984. I received an additional 2-4 years of incarceration for the escape.

Shortly after my return to prison, I decided it was time to begin working on myself, to change the person I had become, so that I could be the person I should have been all along.

It took several years of dealing with mental and emotional issues before I was finally ready to start looking for my spiritual connection and my spiritual path. I considered different religious views, but they just couldn't answer questions to my satisfaction, so I continued to search.

Through the years, there was something pulling at my spirit. I was open to the Red Road teachings because I genuinely wanted to be the kind of son, brother, friend and neighbor that a mother, brother, friend and neighbor would be proud to have around. I had a lot of issues and I just wanted to be a good man. The values and the ideology of the Native Ancestors began to speak to my spirit and I began to grow and change.

At the time, I didn't know that I had Native ancestry. After several years of walking the Native Red Road, in the year 2007, my birth family was able to track me down. It was then that I discovered that I am one quarter Cherokee. The pulling in my spirit was my own Native Ancestors calling me to live a meaningful life upon the Native Red Road. Since then, I have been listening to the Elders, learning, growing and walking the sacred path of my Ancestors.

The Red Road teachings gripped my heart and soul and inspired me to become a better man. Today, I am a person that I am proud to be. I am a person with a purpose and with values, morals and ideals that are leading me to live a successful and satisfying life.

I would like to share some of the lessons that I have learned, that have led to my growth and maturity upon the Native Red Road. It is my hope that what I share will make the journey on your path just a little better.

Sincerely,

Joe "Little Eagle" Kinney

NEEDLES

My name, as my incarcerated brothers and sisters call me, is Needles. I received that name because one of my “hustles” to make money and to barter was from sewing.

Physically, I look like my family. But, for as far back as I can remember, I felt very separate and different from them. I remember things that they don't. I knew things they didn't seem to know. As a child, I remember saying, “I don't have parents. I was beamed down.” In “The Ra Material” they call people like me a “wanderer.”

All of my life, I've been mildly psychic. Although I can't tell you the winning lotto numbers, I often drift off and see things that happen later. For as far back as I can remember, in this incarnation, I've had a nagging feeling that something was off. The older I became, the more intense the feeling.

Much to the displeasure of the Catholic nuns who taught me in catechism classes, I often asked the questions they didn't want to, or couldn't answer. So, right after confirmation (a required event in my family), I left the church. Looking back, I realized I was unconsciously in search of the Truth. I always considered myself Spiritual. I knew something Bigger existed.

Then in my late 20's, my closest aunt died. I rushed to be with my family. While staying in my mom's house, I had fallen asleep and my aunt came to me. I woke in tears, filled with more Love and Wonder than I have vocabulary to describe. Up to that time, it was the most REAL experience of my life. I was literally visited by an angel! Whenever I recall it, tears come to my eyes and I am filled with love.

That was my conscious beginning, my Spiritual kick start. Since then, every close relative has come to visit after they have departed this plane of existence. These events kept me Seeking. As it is said in the scriptures, “Those that Seek in earnest, shall Find.” WOW! Did I find! I hope, that in this book, I can help you find something, too.

In my late 30s, after the “world financial crisis,” I completely changed my life. Single and virtually penniless, I moved to Los Angeles to share a house with a group of friends who were practitioners in various disciplines. I wanted to live, learn and experience it all!

With their help, I was able to tear down some walls and let in what was being taught. With some of the practices, the depth of knowledge gained was immense. With others, I woke up to “pre-birth” memories, got a lot and found out there was more to come. Much more!

Soon after, I was arrested in a tax case in front of 3,000 of my peers. I was indicted and eventually pled out. Disgraced by the media, I lost all my money, businesses, houses, material possessions and my reputation. During that time, I found myself in the SHU (solitary confinement) for 92 days. This was the most scared I'd ever been.

One stress-filled horrendous day, I couldn't take it anymore. In that moment of utter desperation, with tears flowing, I looked up and said, “I can't do this – take over!” Then I fell asleep. I woke up drenched. But there was an immense weight that had lifted from me. Gone! I felt light, free and happy. Truly happy! Even though I was still in a cold, dark and damp cell with noise and chaos all around me. It turns out that prison is not a place. It's a state of mind...

RICHARD FRANCIS

My name is Richard Joseph Francis. I was born a few days before Christmas in 1989. While growing up as a young boy in Portland, Jamaica, I experienced the joys of no worries, stress or anything in those categories because I was so busy playing in the sand, dancing in the rain, making my own toys and sailing in the Gulf of Mexico with my babysitter's husband. We went fishing a lot. He was an expert carpenter, making boats and furniture.

My mom, step-dad, three siblings and I shared a one-bedroom apartment. At five, I didn't realize the poverty that threatened us. For some divine reason, we never went without. My mom always had a helping hand. Both of my grandmothers were successful business women who ventured back and forth from the USA to Jamaica, like merchants.

While attending church in Jamaica, I remember feeling very uncomfortable and lost. I didn't know who Jesus was and what the preacher was talking about. Yet, he made me feel guilty and sad because of my sins, even though I didn't know what that meant.

I had an attitude as a child. My older brother, Ron, and I always fought and argued. From the inside out, I didn't feel happy and peaceful for many years. I was quick to become angry and wanted things to be done my way, on my time. I was stubborn, slow to forgive, fast to hold grudges and violent.

In 1997, when I was eight years old, Ron and I migrated to Tampa, Florida so that we could live with our dad, my step-mom and her two kids. I began to adapt to the American lifestyle, attending school and learning how to read, write, do math and other educational studies.

My attitude didn't vanish, though. Of the four kids in the household, I was the main one to get into trouble – fighting kids in school, getting suspended and fighting the kids in the neighborhood.

My family began attending neighbor churches and I began learning more and more about a Higher Power and some divine man named Jesus, who walked the Earth and lived a perfect life. He was sent to Earth by God to show humans how to live and that he came to die for my sins.

I began changing my mindset because my eyes were seeing the pain and suffering that my actions were causing – and I didn't like it. At first, I couldn't see and didn't notice the pain and misery I was causing people, so I continued to do it. One day, I was beating up a kid on the school bus and I noticed his facial expression. I saw the sadness, fear and grief I was causing him and instantly, I felt his pain and his experience. I realized that what I was doing was pointless and a waste of time and there was no joy or benefit in causing suffering.

I came to realize that my negative actions were expressing how I felt on the inside, easing out into the material world. I began to dislike the fact that people feared me. I now wanted people to like me and draw near to me, not move away from me.

Instead of waking up every day to pick fights, argue and complain, I began finding activities and incentives that would bring me inner joy, happiness and peace. While in school, I began playing football, softball and basketball. I dominated in track and field. I became increasingly motivated and competitive in most sports that I played at school and in the neighborhood.

When things didn't go my way, my first thought wasn't to fight or kill anymore. My first thought was to seclude myself and reason with myself. I would ask myself, "Why isn't this working? Can I look at this another way? Could there be a better way?" I began to ask myself and others questions about everything I perceived not to be in accordance with my liking...

DARRIS DRAKE, JR

I came into the world on June 14, 1986, premature and underweight, with cocaine pumping through my life blood. My parents struggled with addiction, so my grandmother filed for full custody when I was three years old. She was granted custody by the judge, but my mother wasn't ready to part ways with me. She purchased a bus ticket for us that departed to Illinois in the middle of the night.

It wasn't long before my grandma tracked us down and came knocking, with a court order in hand. The first memory I have is being pried away from my mother by gloved hands. I still vividly recall my mother's angelic face turned almost demonic from the mixture of anguish and the flashing lights of a police cruiser. The nightmares of my childhood weren't filled with monsters, but the echoes of her screams, "My baby! Don't take my baby!"

As I grew older, I subconsciously chased the love and acceptance I felt was missing from my parents' absence, in all the wrong places. During my teens, this desire transformed into anger. I felt the world was imposing its will upon me and the only way to combat this feeling of helplessness was to impose my will on others, physically. Violence became second nature to me, and as a result, juvenile institutions became my second home.

After one trip to an institution, my mother moved back to Washington and was finally clean! My grandmother agreed to let me move in with her, hoping it would help me. This was my lifelong dream and at 16 years of age, I'd never been happier! My mom was my best friend. Over the next few months, our bond became stronger than ever.

One day, I was at my friend's house when we were startled by a loud banging at the front door. My friend went to answer it and after a few moments, he yelled, "Darris, it's for you!" I was struck with confusion. Nobody knew I was here. I opened the front door and was staring into the face of my sister and aunt! Both had rivers of tears mixed with mascara running down their faces and dripping off their chins. My aunt opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out, just empty gasps. That's when my sister uttered two words that would alter my world forever. "Mom's dead!"

After my mother's overdose from Oxycontin, my life spun wildly out of control. I was caught in a tornado of drugs, violence and despair! I engaged in home invasions and shootouts, like I had a death wish, often taking the same drug that killed my mom. In some sick, twisted way, I felt closer to her when I was doing oxy's. I lashed out at anyone who attempted to stop me from destroying myself. I lost most of my friends, due to my behavior, while driving myself deeper into a deafening isolation.

I received a call from an old friend one day. He had just been released from prison and needed help getting back on his feet. He said he had been hearing that I was robbing drug dealers in the area and he wanted in. I felt I owed him for teaching me the "ins and outs" of "the game" when I was young. Out of loyalty, I agreed and filled him in on the plan.

We found a place to park and watched the scene for a while. When everything went dark, we headed for the house. When we reached the front door, I kicked it right below the knob and it exploded inward! We ran into the house and as I hit the hallway, the moonlight illuminated the target's room. I saw him stand up and bend over at the waist. I knew his gun was under his pillow...

SCOTT HAYDEN

I wish to dedicate my contributions in this book to my friend Andrew B.,
who helped to reaffirm my belief in the goodness of others.

I would also like to extend a very special thanks to my friend and literary mentor,

Theresa Crabtree, for her valuable assistance in making my contribution to this book possible!

I grew up in a highly repressive and controlled environment. In our household, the only opinions that mattered were those of my parents. I was their offspring and expected to be an extension of themselves. There was to be no evidence of self-expression. I felt duly muzzled, like a barking dog. Crying was considered by my father as a sign of weakness and I was often mocked for doing so.

An event that happened one morning forever changed the course of my overall world view. At ten years of age, I took on a morning paper delivery route. I had to complete my route before 7:00 am on school days. Before dawn on a cold winter morning, under crystal clear skies, I was heading east on my bicycle. In my peripheral vision, there was a sudden flash of light. I stopped in the middle of the road and looked up at the moon and stars. As I stared at the moon, it seemed to slowly grow closer, however, I soon realized that the moon wasn't growing closer, I was moving towards it! For what seemed only seconds, I flew past the moon and beyond. Soon, another object came into focus, which I clearly recognized as the red planet Mars.

I quickly flew past Mars, then soon encountered a group of huge rocks. Soon, a rather large, out of focus image formed before me. As I grew closer to the object, I identified it as the planet Jupiter. I then circled around the giant planet and the very next thing I remember was once again sitting on my bicycle in the middle of the street. The moon and stars appeared as they were before.

As I looked in front of me, I noticed the glow of sunlight below the eastern horizon. I hurriedly delivered the remainder of the papers, then headed home. As I burst through the door of our kitchen, I remember my mom making the comment, "Got a late start delivering? Eat something fast or you'll be late for school." I was too excited to tell her about my experience and besides, I had to get on to school.

As I sat in class, I thought about everything that had happened that morning – including the feeling of weightlessness and the absence of bodily sensation. I felt as if there was this dark void all around me, with the exception of what I viewed in front of me. Ever since that experience, my interest in the unexplained has become an adventure of discovery.

Throughout my childhood, I had an impulsion to be anywhere else other than the emotional prison I was forced to live in. In order to mentally survive, I often withdrew deep inside myself. Perhaps this is why I was so reflective at such a young age, and later, as an adult. Little could I foresee that such a restrictive and controlled environment would eventually shape my future in so many negative ways. The barking dog was soon to break free from its chain...

DAMON SCOTT-STOUT

At 19 years of age, in August of 1994, I was arrested and would spend the next quarter of a century of my life serving out an 8 to 25-year prison sentence. Of biracial parentage, I had a troublesome life growing up in a small rural area in northeastern Ohio, where prejudice and racial hatred flourished. Rejection and wounded pride got the best of me. Having gotten caught up in a vicious cycle of fighting, drugs and a life of crime, things quickly went from bad to worse.

Not one for authority, mainstream religion never appealed to me. My misspent youth found me involved with witchcraft, pagan and heathen religions for all the wrong reasons. All that changed in October of 2017 when, after many years of searching for Truth, I finally embraced the Light and became a true believer in Christ.

For me, Truth was found in the Kabbalah of the Western Wisdom Mystery Tradition, with similar parallels found in Freemasonry, Gnosticism and Rosicrucian Christianity. This is the Path of Initiation, which allows mystics and spiritual warriors alike to ascend the Middle Pillar, directly approaching the Throne, where salvation is synonymous with Self-realization. I believe this is the ultimate objective of lost souls while incarnate here on Earth: to pursue that wisdom which reveals Truth and, ultimately, the way back home.

From my early teens onward, til I came to embrace Mystic “Esoteric” Christianity, I took many liberties in exploring and practicing several other religions that finally helped to substantiate my path as follower of Christ today. Shamanism and Native American Spirituality, Hatha Yoga, Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Islam, Sufism, Khemetian Metu Neter, Saiva Hinduism, Samkhya Yoga and Teutonic Folkways. From October 2017 on, I've been a devout follower of Christ and a student and practitioner of Kabbalah. Most of my adult life has also been devoted to studying Cultural Anthropology as well, which includes comparative mythology and philosophy.

My testimony is that of the Prodigal Son. The journey I now share with others is so they too might find and travel on the Path of Initiation, making a triumphal return back to the Kingdom. Yahweh, our Father in heaven, awaits each one of us with open arms, along with the angels and saints, and all those who've made the final ascent in their homeward journeys.

May the road rise to meet you on your journey, my fellow travelers. If you find solace in but one thing during your prison sentence and throughout life, find it in the God within yourself. Stand in the Light, believe in the Truth and follow the Way to Redemption and you will find salvation in Christ, the Messiah.

Bright Blessings,

Damon Scott-Stout

Other Books by Theresa Crabtree

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