

EPILOGUE

“When Keats ... was transformed from a young lad without a vocation to a young lad who knew that his destiny lay in poetry, he did not think he had changed himself but had been changed, born from above by a vision of a world of beauty he had never sensed before. So all profound transformations of character are associated with the experience, not of lifting oneself, but of being lifted, not of changing oneself but of being changed.”⁶⁵

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK
Riverside Sermons

The MetaValues Breakthrough is not a self-help book, but rather a MetaValues-help book. My premise is not that we can lift ourselves, but rather that we can be lifted. Our difficulties lie in that we know better, but refuse to yield and *allow* ourselves to be lifted. Yield to what? To what we intuitively know to be True, Beautiful, and Good; to act out our lives with nonnegotiable Integrity, Excellence, and Caring. The purpose of this epilogue is to explain how I personally came to believe this as a self-evident truth.

Many years ago, I got on the wrong bus. I thought it would carry me on a journey to independent wealth and happiness. Instead, I ended up in a place of tragedy and despair. There seemed no way out. Then, after many years in a painful wilderness, a simple change

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of mind allowed me to be lifted out of my situation and be gently placed on the path of a wonderfully new way of life. But, I am getting ahead of my story.

In 1970, I made the fateful decision to leave the gorgeous coastal city of Santa Barbara, California, and move to Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was one of a group of California retail hotshots who planned to build a furniture chain and make millions of dollars. We targeted Tulsa to begin operations because it was a desirable secondary market. We succeeded in the first part of the plan. The Tulsa outlet proved viable and, in a few years, we had a national chain of ten stores, doing the equivalent of a couple hundred million in volume in today's dollars.

To the world, I had chosen the right bus. I had stock in a fast-growing company, a good salary, and a title of Vice President and Director of Marketing. I drove a luxurious Lincoln Mark V and lived in a spacious home. I also had a nice family, including two wonderful daughters. But beneath the surface was the grim truth: *I was in a trap and there were no clear escape routes.* The company I was working for was inhuman and exploitive. I detested my job. I was neglecting my family. As eventually happens with people who get on the wrong bus, I began to look around and wonder: *How did I get to this strange place? Why am I doing things I don't feel good about? Why am I associating with people I don't trust?* Unfortunately, I believed at the time that my options for action were very limited.

Suddenly, a new problem arose. My thirteen-year-old daughter's behavior began to change radically. My sweet, innocent Vicki became a different person almost overnight. I could no longer communicate with her. She began to lie, dress bizarrely, and to associate with

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unusual new friends. Her grades plummeted. I reacted by denying the symptoms. I told myself this phase would pass. I knew about some of the signs that signaled serious drug problems, but convinced myself that such things only happened to other families. In any event, I believed I needed only to exert willpower to gain control over the situation.

One morning, as I pulled the car out of the driveway to go to work, a piece of trash on the grass outside of Vicki's window caught my eye. I discovered that it was a plastic bag that seemed coated on the inside with dried paint. As I carried the bag inside the house, my mind raced. I had a vague recollection of an activity known as sniffing, the breathing of aerosol can propellants to get a high. I confronted Vicki, and she reluctantly admitted that she was involved with this activity. "It's fun," she said.

What followed was a flurry of ineffective efforts to cope. The Oklahoma school authorities seemed helpless to do much about open drug use and sniffing activities a few feet from school property. There was no reliable place to go for advice. Counseling did not work; none of the existing agencies appeared to be effective. The personnel seemed poorly trained and lethargic. A session with one counselor, a reformed sniffer and drug user, actually did a great deal of harm. Afterward, Vicki said, "He was able to stop and he's OK. He said he tried everything. It didn't hurt him."

Vicki seemed incapable of giving up her compulsion to sniff substances. My wife and I learned that she was experimenting with other drugs. We consulted a prestigious Tulsa psychiatrist who reassured us, and designed a therapy program for Vicki. But by now, she was totally out of control and began leaving the house

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at night through her window. I became deeply concerned about her physical safety.

The psychiatrist recommended I put Vicki in an expensive treatment center in Tulsa. It was a huge hospital with a sophisticated psychiatric ward. The psychiatrist was confident that under his direction, the controlled milieu, intense therapy, and dedicated staff would help my daughter. Although it was an open ward (patients were not locked up), he told me the professional staff monitored patients carefully. He assured me Vicki would be safe.

Vicki worked with a female associate-therapist on the doctor's staff. The therapist explained to me that the situation with Vicki had exposed severe family dysfunctions. Vicki was the identified family member, the one singled out and blamed for all the things that were wrong with the family in general. In a dysfunctional family, the members generally cooperate in keeping up a facade of tranquility. In our case, my wife and I were hiding a loveless marriage. But continued denial of our problems seemed the easiest course and we were not ready to face the reality of what our marriage had become. One day, after a private session with Vicki's therapist, my wife came home and angrily said, "She asked me if *I* wanted to begin therapy sessions! Can you believe it! What is wrong with that woman?"

About this time, my wife discovered that Vicki had written diaries. Counter to the psychiatrist's advice and her promises to me, my wife read them. She was appalled at the full scope of Vicki's activities. The relationship between the two deteriorated to the point that they could not endure being in the same room. Before long, I was the only one who visited Vicki at the hospital.

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I decided to leave my wife, having nursed a secret desire to do so for a long time. My wife suggested that I could bring up Vicki and she could take our other daughter, nine-year-old Kathleen. One morning, when I was putting my clothes in the car, little Kathleen came up to me. She asked where I was going. I told her I was taking a little vacation and would be back soon. That lie would torture me for years to come.

Meanwhile, Vicki became depressed in the hospital. She seemed to feel guilty about the family problems. Her spirits rose when I told her I had arranged to place her in a local children's treatment center, a facility with more intense therapy and dedicated personal attention. There were more young people there and some good peer models. She seemed anxious to get started. The move was delayed a week because an anticipated slot at the new hospital was held up. But I assured Vicki that it would take place in a few more days, just after her fourteenth birthday. When I left her that day, she was in good spirits. She seemed encouraged that in the new treatment center, she would make better progress and could earn more of the freedom she craved.

But the move never happened.

The next afternoon, Vicki and another girl (who also had a sniffing compulsion) managed to talk an attending nurse at the front desk of the psychiatric ward into giving them a plastic bag. The girls went into a room, closed the door, and, for nearly two hours, sniffed aerosol deodorant to get high.

Then a scream came from the room. Vicki had collapsed.

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Later that evening, my wife telephoned me at my apartment. She told me the hospital had called. Something was wrong, but they were evasive. I quickly picked her up and drove her there. At the front door of the ward, Vicki's psychiatrist met us. He told us that Vicki Mullins was dead.

Today it is difficult for me to recall many details of the blur of unreality that followed. After the funeral, the full weight of Vicki's death bore down. Vicki, my daughter, the wonderfully talented artist, had vanished. One day I had left her in the hospital ward. In my mind's eye, I could still see her, smiling, waving good-bye to me. The cowboy hat I had just bought her was cocked to one side. Then suddenly all that was left of my little girl was a pathetic shopping cart that the hospital had filled with her belongings and then had called me and asked me to remove. I do remember one other scene clearly. A few months after the tragedy, I knelt at Vicki's gravesite on a chilly, gray morning in November. A light mist was falling. I touched the brutal bronze plaque upon which was etched the reality of the situation:

Vicki Lynn Mullins, Beloved Daughter

1960–1974

I then read aloud a poem I had written to Vicki:

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September, '74

Autumn comes now,

trees blaze and winds grow cool and sharp.

But, you cannot awe the colors this year,

nor swim in the crisp air.

Say,

What would you give now,

To taste those awful hospital hamburgers?

To look up at me across the cafeteria table?

To feel my lips good-bye on your cheek?

To hear my warm words, edged with impatience?

Me,

I don't know what I wouldn't give to see you alive again.

But, no matter.

You lie below,

and the leaves blow by,

rustling sadly,

like a thousand vain regrets of mine.

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My words hung barren and pathetic in the sullen, brooding air. There were no ears to hear them. Or so I believed.

I was a loner with no support system to help me. In desperation, I began to read everything I could find about human behavior, trying to learn what had happened to Vicki. Most of all, I wanted to know if she had somehow survived the death of her body. I came to believe in a religious philosophy that assured me that I would see Vicki again one day. I believed she was now in the care of a benevolent, merciful, personal, parental power of inconceivable magnitude. I imagine, if this story were a Hollywood movie script, the balance of the narrative would describe how I became a saint and learned to serve humanity. But my lessons were barely beginning.

The Aftermath

“Many men have thus a secret monster, a disease which they feed, a dragon which gnaws them, a despair which inhabits their night. Such a man resembles other people, goes, comes. Nobody knows that he has within him a fearful parasitic pain, with a thousand teeth, which lives in the miserable man, who is dying of it. Nobody knows that this man is a gulf. It is stagnant, but deep. From time to time, a troubling, of which we understand nothing, shows itself on its surface. A mysterious wrinkle comes along, then vanishes, then reappears; a bubble of air rises and bursts. It is a little thing, it is terrible. It is the breathing of the unknown monster.”⁶⁶

VICTOR HUGO
Les Misérables

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In the years that followed, I went through a divorce and lost a painful lawsuit against the hospital. Shortly after the trial ended, Vicki's mother died of the cancer that she had developed less than a year after the devastating loss of her child. I got remarried, perhaps too soon. I was blessed with a beautiful new daughter, Michelle. Finally leaving the corporate world, I began my own marketing and consulting business. I moved to Oklahoma City, ninety miles from the melancholy memories of Tulsa. My daughter, Kathleen, and I worked hard to improve our relationship; slowly, we started getting along. To the world, it may have seemed that I had passed through the tragedy and gone on to do good works. I continued to search for enlightenment and even wrote a few self-help related books. Becoming a somewhat accomplished speaker, I gave seminars on creativity, management, and self-actualization. Yet, down deep in the secret place, I knew something was still terribly wrong.

Within my heart of hearts, I held on to my hatred of the hospital for their negligence and mistakes that led to Vicki's death. Within my inner life lived the venomous resentments I had so long held toward the hospital staff that had permitted Vicki to die and the surgically cold attorneys who had humiliated me in court. Friends who knew about the catastrophe and its aftermath assured me I was justified in harboring resentments. This was well-intentioned but unwise counsel. Because, as we have learned, the law of resentments operates just as inexorably as gravity. There is a price for victimhood.

Then, after eleven years, my second marriage ended. The sudden termination of this relationship hit me with stunning surprise. I wanted a completely new beginning. A close friend suggested that I try group therapy. With a great deal of hesitation—and cynicism—I did so.

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The group therapy process was tough. I was required to do something I had never done before: assume an attitude of humility. At one point, participants were required to write and discuss a personal moral inventory. This inventory was to include personal failures and wrongs, character flaws, and harbored resentments. It was at this point that I began to face my own guilt about my relationships with Vicki and her mother. And, as I read over the several pages of anger and resentments I accumulated over the years, I realized that I had to face my own guilt and share of the blame. I came to believe that I was damaged goods. At the same time, I saw no way to repair the damage. The therapy group leader suggested to me that I needed a private session with a more experienced counselor. I agreed, provided I could work with a complete stranger. In a day or so, he gave me the name of an expert counselor in Tulsa.

The Unexpected Peak Experience

So it happened that, fourteen years after Vicki's death, I found myself making the ninety-mile trip from Oklahoma City to Tulsa. As I entered the city that day and drove past the towering hospital, I felt my heart sink in dismay. *That's where they killed Vicki*, I thought. I wanted to turn back to Oklahoma City and forget the whole thing, but I decided to see it through.

It was early afternoon when I reached Ted Wenger's beautiful Tulsa home. Dr. Wenger, a pleasant-looking man in his sixties, was retired. We exchanged a few polite comments as we sat in his comfortable study. He provided me with a cup of fresh coffee, and we prepared to get down to work.

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“Dr. Wenger,” I said, “before we begin I must tell you something. I know that the purpose of this process is to help heal the resentments I carry within my heart. It is only fair for me to disclose that I have a resentment that not even God could remove. I know this beyond question. So, before we start, I will tell you about it ...”

I narrated to him the events of Vicki’s death fourteen years before, and its terrible impact upon my life. He listened, his eyes fastened on mine. When I finished, I was surprised that he seemed shaken; his face was white. It took a few moments for him to speak, and I will never forget his words.

“Larry, there is only one place on earth that you should be today and that is here. There is only one person you should be talking to and that is me. What I am about to say astounds me as much as it will you. I am the doctor who led the code blue team that tried to save Vicki’s life that night. I remember her vividly. I held her little body in my arms. I thought we had saved her, but then her exhausted heart went into fibrillation and she slipped away. For weeks afterward, I searched our medical library to see if our team had done something wrong, to see if there was a different method that might have been more successful. I satisfied myself finally that we had done all that was humanly possible to save her. But I never forgot her. After I read about the trial, I wanted to meet you, Vicki’s father, to tell you these things. And now, at last, I have.”

As though moving of its own accord, my hand reached slowly out to his. We sat silently, hand in hand, for what must have been a long time. For us, for an interlude, time did not exist. The mellow afternoon sunlight slanted long across the floor of his study before we spoke again. I remember virtually nothing of what we said.

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I did not begin to grasp what had happened until later, when I drove past the hospital again on my way out of Tulsa. The hated building was somehow transformed. Now it stood gilded and beautiful in the late afternoon sun. At that point, clearly in my mind I heard the words: *That's where they tried to save Vicki's life that night.* I don't think anyone actually spoke to me. But it was as though someone had placed a hand upon my shoulder, and gently told me, "My child. Don't tell me what I can or cannot do."

Right then, I realized the incurable pain was gone; I had been completely healed. The resentments and anger were vanished. Later I was to receive a letter informing me that I was not the only one whose life had changed direction after that Tulsa afternoon experience:

"On the day you came into my home to talk with me, I had one of those recurring feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction with myself. It was one of those inexplicable and uncomfortable feelings when we doubt whether there is any power willing or even capable of helping us grow in truth and spirit. I can assure you that after our encounter I was a different man, and I have not had doubts nor a negative feeling of that kind since. Oh, yes, I've had my ups and downs, but I perceive that experience as a turning point in my life, and an important one. I have told of our meeting from my own perspective in several meetings and it never fails to amaze and inspire many, and even 'spook' a few."

*Dr. Theodore Wenger
Tulsa, Oklahoma*

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I had been unaware that I was struggling under immense burdens until the weight of my resentments lifted. I was also free of the encumbrance of guilt. The endless struggle to “fix” myself was over. I no longer shamefully thought of myself as damaged goods. Now, in one peak experience moment, the possibilities seemed endless. With this new clarity came the sense that what I was seeking all these years had always been near at hand. At the time, I thought that I had been given a special gift that afternoon in Tulsa. But I was to learn that virtually all normal people have such experiences.

Chopping Wood and Carrying Water

Even so, my search was not over, but rather renewed at a more advantageous spiritual level. I was to learn that even dramatic peak experiences—by themselves—do not necessarily change lives. It is rather what one does with these gifts that matters. There is an ancient Chinese saying: *Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water.* And so it has been with me. The memory of that afternoon in Tulsa remained vivid, and my life began to improve. However, the peak *feeling* of joy, completeness, and limitless energy began to fade.

The agony of the resentments I carried was gone, but boredom and anxiety gradually returned to dominate my life. *Why?* I wondered. *Why couldn't I maintain that sense of total renewal—that grasp of a higher reality that I had when I left Tulsa and saw the hospital I hated transformed into something of wonder and beauty? Why couldn't I make that extraordinary level of consciousness return to stay? Or, at least a meaningful degree of that fleeting, powerful, glad-to-be-alive feeling?* I am convinced that the concept of MetaValues provides part of the answer to these questions. Maslow believed

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that MetaValues are somehow biologically based and a pathway toward optimal mental health. For me, they became a pathway to an experience of God on a new level.

The grand premise of *The MetaValues Breakthrough* is that, to the degree that we strive for greater and greater expression of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, we are lifted by the most powerful forces in the universe. We are lifted because we are in tune with the purpose of the creator of the universe. One cannot have a relationship with biology. And Maslow seemed to perceive this when he wrote in his journals, late in his life:

“It’s no longer controllable. I must go the way I must go ... I’m contributing what no one else can & what I rationally believe ought to be written about. Most important thing I can do is write my ideas about science, about B-psychology, about metamotivation, etc. If there were an all-wise dictator someplace, that’s what he’d order me to do.”⁶⁷

Even so, the complete answer cannot be found in the pages of any book. The greatest story of all will be lived, not written. It will be the story you reveal to the world as you live out your life. Don’t imagine that you must begin with a world-changing vision to set the self-actualizing process into motion. Viktor Frankl had a modest vision of his destiny when he was trapped in a Nazi death camp. Doubtless, the Nazi guards would have laughed at his vision. But long after the Nazis of that day drifted into shame and oblivion, the legacy of Frankl’s journey lives on.

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Whatever dream burns in your heart today may also seem laughable to some who underestimate you, considering the odds against it. Believe your dream all the more. Your dream is more important than any material priority. In the meantime, whatever is placed before you, engage it with all your heart and soul. Being a great teacher, a great mother or father, or even a great neighbor—any endeavors that change other lives are worthy and important self-actualizing goals.

May you become one of those rare, pragmatic visionaries who have the realistic insight to see life as it is, and also the poetic and spiritual vision to see life as it ought to be. And, may you do even more than dream of things that ought to be. May you become one of those even rarer actualizers who dare to move in the direction of those dreams, knowing that *anything, absolutely anything that ought to be actualized must be actualized*. Circumstances may seem to impede, but they cannot prevent.

Each wholehearted effort to contact the source of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good will be successful. We are all in this together, including the “all-wise dictator.”

Persist, find, yield, and be lifted.