

I always thought of spirituality as something deeply religious. Or, at least something which one needed a background of religiosity from which to espouse the spiritual with any credibility. Then, I read *The Variety of Religious Experiences* by William James and my attitude changed. I had read James as an undergraduate at Stanford University, but I had not really read him. Know what I mean? I mean, I didn't internalize his work; I didn't make his work relevant to my life. Back then my understanding of James was a purely academic exercise (if I could dare to call it such). My experiences from 2007 – 2011 provided the perspective I needed to understand some of the writing found in that book. While I am grateful for arriving at an understanding of spirituality which has helped me to put my life in a context to which I could truthfully acquiesce, at least right now, I regret that such an arrival came at the expense of such drastic changes of my life circumstances.

James suggests that spirituality is an individual's "total reaction upon life...that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence, intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious, which in some degree everyone possesses."¹ From this I took an understanding that regardless of my understanding of religion in any sanctioned, recognized, institutionalized form, I, to some degree, possessed *a certain* spirituality reflective of my reaction upon life. I came to understand that what I possessed was a feminine spirituality, in part due to my adherence to what Sigmund Freud called the *reality principle* but what Herbert Marcuse would more correctly label the *performance principle*. Prior to 2007, I practiced a feminized spirituality according to Freud's reality principle, but what I ached for, what I longed for, was to experience a more masculine spirituality focused on the pleasure principle. Had I been more knowledgeable, more understanding, more willing to accept the lessons that history has wrought and accepting of the fact that I am to a certain degree powerless when confronted with the might and strength of collective cultural consciousness and desire, I would have acknowledged that the individual contention with authority in the United States usually resulted in disastrous consequences. This book traces my metamorphosis from an academic scholar to a federal felon as a result of attempting to live according to the pleasure principle in my gamble to practice masculine spirituality in twenty-first century America. I lay bare my greatest strengths, my most profound weaknesses and highlight a self-destructive, sabotaging aspect of my character which I have been forced to acknowledge, accept and embrace in my attempt to overcome setbacks which have served to thwart personal ambitions. It is my most sincere hope that my words find an audience which could benefit and learn from the trials and tribulations of a young man at war with himself in the pursuit of becoming entirely human while at the same time becoming more and more aware of himself as a mechanic assemblage.

I don't know when I developed a rebellious spirit. Better said: I don't know when I began to act upon rebellious thoughts in my head. If I had to pick a time when such a development happened, then I would suggest: after I graduated from high school. My high school years were the best times of my life. I attended Mary Institute and St. Louis Country Day School. My family wasn't rich or influential, but as God should have it, I found my way to the school. I graduated in 1994. It was a magnificent time. I had never attended a school where I felt so safe and free to learn. When I say safe I don't mean safe from the sexual advance of teachers, or safe from the verbal and psychological abuses of instructors and coaches. I mean safe from drive-by shootings and marauding gangs. Safe to like learning. Safe to indulge one's intellect. I had always dreamed

¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 27.

of going to college. And, MICDS, along with the love and support of both my maternal grandmother, R. P., and my paternal grandmother, I. B. C., enabled such a dream to come true. I don't really know if I knew why I was going to college, I just knew that I had been told all my life that attending college was my only means of improving the life and lot into which I had been born. So, I was expected to, and I expected myself to, attend the university. But the telling of that story should take place in another book.

I lived with my paternal grandmother while attending MICDS. When I was accepted to the school in 1989 the school was called St. Louis Country Day School. It always reminded me of the typical east coast, all-male, college preparatory academy. The school would merge with Mary Institute, its sister school, in 1992. The founders of MI had ties to T.S. Eliot, which makes me chuckle as I reflect on my role as a scholar of literature. At any rate, I lived with my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandmother handled all of the financial aspects of my enrollment at CDS. From 1989 to 1994 I thrived and matriculated. There continued to be cyclical ups and downs in my personal and familial lives, but I thrived at MICDS. Everything associated with MICDS resulted in success for me. I didn't live with my mother or my siblings; I didn't even know my siblings, but by going to college and leading a productive life I could have the opportunity to change such things. Or, so I thought.

I was accepted to some of the best colleges and universities that America has to offer. There was the University of Southern California, Pomona College, Stanford University, Michigan University, Morehouse College, Princeton University, Georgetown University, Dartmouth University, the University of North Carolina, Northwestern University, the University of Miami and the United States Air Force Academy. I chose Stanford. In part because my mother lived in California (at least she did when I applied to the school) and, while other schools may have had more black students, Stanford had the most black students concentrated in any one area on their campus. Make of it what you will. The plan was determined. I was accepted to Stanford in May of 1994. I would graduate from MICDS in early June 1994. I would eventually graduate from Stanford and life would be great.

R.P. died in 1994: the day before my graduation from MICDS. She would never see the fruits of her sacrifice and commitment regarding my education at MICDS. I.B.C. died two weeks later. She would never experience my leaving from her home for the final time: the results of her love and hospitality for five years. I would never again see life through the eyes I did prior to their deaths. The lost of the matriarch from my mother's family and the simultaneous lost of the matriarch from my father's family ripped both families asunder and obliterated my ability to find purpose in life for quite some time. At eighteen I was responsible for getting my education at Stanford paid for. Oh, and I still had to physically get to Stanford. But, as it turned out, finding means to travel between Palo Alto and St. Louis would be the least of my worries. Not allowing what had been to this point in my life a spirit free of corruption to become corrupted would be my greatest battle. I would lose.