**DESTINY’S QUEST**

By Dennis R. Archambault, PhD

I am a man of destiny. Born on the day of Hiroshima, surviving combat in Vietnam as a 2Lt Marine Corps Platoon and Company Commander, running the bulls in Pamplona, Spain where one bull’s horn almost disemboweled me except for my quick “kip” over the oak barrier fence, and living through small moments “that might have been” from dangerous behaviors – mine and others – I have endured. I have been spared harm in order to serve it.

The search for my destiny began early, starting with a newspaper’s comics page that blew into the backyard on a blustery, gray overcast winter’s day in Owensboro, Kentucky when I was 7, in 1952. This sheet showed a *Ripley’s Believe it or Not* cartoon depicting four Chinese walking abreast into the ocean with the caption reading that there were so many Chinese alive that four could walk side by side into the sea forever. To be different and to have a life of meaning and purpose, I realized it would be through national leadership. And in order to attain the Presidency, I knew that I would have to first finish the second grade and then to continue with schooling until I had a college degree. I would then volunteer for the United States Marine Corps, its Officer program, and for combat during a war. It was through war that Washington, Grant and Eisenhower, among others, become president and that would be how I would manifest my vision as well. When combat decorated John F. Kennedy was elected President, there was absolutely no doubt; this was my path. The horrors of war of those dying all around me, and next to me, were accepted by the profoundest belief in a destiny supported by God. No bullet or piece of shrapnel ever touched me. None would. I was walking with Destiny with a capital D. And after all, how could I have known as a child that a war would be waged by the time I was 17. It wasn’t until I returned from Vietnam and had begun my ongoing 4+ decades of healing Inner Work that it was clear that this vision was the desperate longing for love and approval not obtained from my dysfunctional family upbringing.

But it is not so simple to release such a profound investment in my perceived destiny, in its every aspect, having risked my life and having everything oriented to this goal up to that point. I knew in my heart and soul that I had to campaign at least a few times in order not to feel that I had betrayed myself by not trying. I was an Administrator at the University of Southern California and I took a leave of absence. When my purpose was made known, my successful career was over with politely disguised ridicule. To be free, however, I persevered and created the Evolutionary Party, of which I was its Presidential Candidate. By then knowing the misguidance of my vision, and to be at Soul peace, I only required of myself that I campaign twice on the platform of “He Listens.” My first day of “safe” campaigning was at Venice Beach in California, where “eccentrics” live. I really fitted in. They LOVED me and an ensemble musical group played the National Anthem for me. Only one or two people came to my table to talk, I never gave one speech, but that didn’t matter because I was purging this desperate goal from my life. The second day was at Century City, the bastion of money and greed in Los Angeles. That made me *anxious*, with fantasies of not so subtle ridicule. My table was set up in the middle of the large sunken courtyard between high rise buildings. People coming out of them would be walking in my general direction lost in thought, see me, and quickly detour around me. It was great fun to watch, especially since I knew that this was to be my last day. Finally, my three-hour hegira came to an end and I gladly packed up. In celebration of my “healing,” I went to the nearby Playboy Club restaurant for a feast. On entering the restaurant, a maître d’ approached and asked, “Party of one?” I playfully looked down to my chest in self-amusement and replied, “What? Is that written on me somewhere?” Needless to say, he had no context and did not find me amusing but bizarre. However, I enjoyed a lobster, filet mignon, wine, all the trimmings…and dessert. I was free.

Still, there was this destiny thing. If not all this, what?

Years of success and promotions in management, corporate writing and programs development followed. In the process of attaining the first of three Masters, culminating with a Doctorate in Mythology, with a Depth Psychology Emphasis, I met Jeanne Tisdale Trudeau, PhD, LCSW, my soulmate to be of 36 years, in a “Terrorism Psychology” Certification program\* at the University of Southern California, chaired by the late Dr. Frederick Hacker, MD. His reputation came, in part, from being the court-appointed Psychoanalytic expert for the Patty Hearst trial.

Jeanne was a Social Worker at Northridge Hospital’s Emergency Room, and a member of the Psych Team, counseling those who came in as a result of a suicide attempt or in contemplation of one. Her gift was to give each person Hope, with a capital H. We can endure many trials in life if we have hope but we quickly die without it. Jeanne always gave each troubled soul Hope and not one ever attempted suicide after being with her.

Our life together, as soulmates, is the most precious treasure of my life. When Jeanne began to show a mental decline, I took her to be evaluated by the Director of the Alzheimer’s Clinic at UCLA. Jeanne was diagnosed with advanced dementia. In conversations with them regarding her conversational flow from dreaming states to consciousness and other symptoms, it was felt Jeanne suffered specifically from Lewy Body Dementia.

I was her Primary Caregiver during those last agonizing 8 years. To watch this brilliant, emotionally empathic woman decline daily was heart wrenching. In the last 2-3 years, I lay with her holding her hand all but 6 hours a day because she frequently suffered from severe Vertigo attacks. Even with her eyes open, when an attack of vertigo occurred, she was overcome in terror. Instantly squeezing her hand, I gave her comfort. I would say, “I’m here.” Jeanne would relax and sigh, “I’m glad.” That was when she could still talk. Later, her squeeze in reply was eloquent.

I believe we agreed, as spirits unborn, to teach and support one another. She taught me her emotional intuitive skills and I was there to support her through the last terrible years we were together. It was then that I realized that *she* was my destiny. It was actually a joy not to have to seek it, or even to think about it.

When I would return to Jeanne from being in the kitchen, bathroom, getting the mail, answering the phone or wherever, she would smile and start humming. My heart overflowed and I hummed along with her.

Having outside caregivers assisting was essential but oftentimes not helpful. They were women who needed a part-time job and who had minimal training. They would bruise Jeanne by squeezing her hands or forearms too hard trying to get her to sit up or stand. I had to show them how to support Jeanne under her underarms and to let Jeanne do most of the work at ***her*** pace. Good days were always measured in bowel movements. When Jeanne started to hold water or saliva in her mouth, a grape would trigger chewing and swallowing. Disguising the ground-up, horrible tasting medications in applesauce was a challenge to get it all down before the bitterness stopped her eating altogether. You should try some of this to know how noxious it really is, especially for patients who chew everything, including foul tasting gel tablet medicines. It wouldn’t be so casually prescribed if medical personnel tried it themselves.

After I changed Jeanne at 3:30am alone every morning, and after she returned to deep sleep, I would go, escape really, to my library for an hour in order to dance (move in place) to the Eagles or Credence Clearwater Revival. I learned that you cannot dance and be depressed too. It’s one or the other. Neither AARP or the Elizabeth Dole Foundation ever took this suggestion seriously. But it truly is: you cannot move in harmony of body and music and still be depressed. It’s not possible.

As the day of Jeanne’s death drew near, my steps pushed through a plasma of grief and heaviness. I had to force myself to breathe in, and then to exhale slowly out, automatically as best as I could, and always knowing of the impending moment when I would lose Jeanne, whom I loved so dearly. Rampant anxiety raged and confusing fears were of who I was to be, where I was to be, and what I was to be. The dense cloud of agony was suffocating.

I was hospitalized with a nervous breakdown in those last two years. It was technically described as an Acute Anxiety Attack. I asked the nurse at the hospital if it was possible for such an event to make me totally unable to stand, to make decisions, or to “take charge.” His nodding smile was a caring “Yes.”

There is one humorous episode in the 45 minutes of my attack when I passed out four times. Before the first episode, the assisting caregivers looked at my face and urged me to quickly take a seat. Barely seated, I passed out and fell forward landing face-first on the wooden floor. As I awoke from the first episode, I was being attended to by one caregiver wiping blood from my face as well as the floor. A second caregiver had called 911. We were blessed that moment to have the first one staying over for a few minutes to update her replacement. I struggled to raise my head, listening to her talking to the 911 operator, and in my best John Wayne drawl I declared, “I…don’t…need…no…911.” Passing out, I fell face-first onto the floor again.

No one who has never been a Primary Caregiver can ever, *ever*, understand the totality of the psychic and physical exhaustion that is endured and suffered. This is why a huge percentage of caregivers (18%)[[1]](#footnote-1) die before the one they are caring for does. We went through every penny of our checking and savings accounts, including all our investments. We even had to take the largest loan available on her house in order to give me the support needed so that she might die at home, under her stately 100-foot-tall oaks and sycamores. Jeanne never spent one night in a board and care nursing facility. She had solely purchased the property 7 years before she met me, and she alone paid all the mortgage bills, and for all the improvements to the beautiful property in Monte Nido, California. I did most of the work but I was never on Title. To enter her property was to enter into a cathedral of trees. The crowns spread out in a canvas of life and shelter. Her property was believed to be an ancient Chumash Indian ceremonial grounds where oak acorns were prepared for sacred meals. More than one time, I sensed a presence behind me. Startled once at being frightened late at night, I snarled, “You want to talk to me, talk to me, show me who you are. Don’t sneak up on me like that!” No reply, but nor did it return. Pity.

When Jeanne died, I tried to find a grief group for caregiver survivors. The ones in my area wanted expensive year-long contracts. Frustrated, I ended up subscribing to a well-known national dating service that promised me that it had members who were also a surviving spouse, and I was encouraged me to join. But it wasn’t so. They couldn’t offer one name. Besides, really, I was in no psychological condition to be dating, nor did I want to be. I was lonely but not for a new romantic commitment. I simply wanted to be with someone “who had been there” so we could share our experiences and suffering. I got my money back, with some effort, by a charge of false advertising. The Bank of America’s credit card department agreed with me and reversed their membership fee, to the unrelenting resistance of that company claiming a non-refundable contract despite their lack of performance. If this were to happen now, I would simply find a local Hospice grief group.

I continued my search because I knew from my years of Inner Work that expressing our deepest, wounded emotions were absolutely crucial to healing and for a life to be fully lived. But in the pain of those moments, it will not seem so. It is *more than* a good idea to find a grief group, or counselor ---- *it is essential for your happiness in life*. Those who refuse to do grief work go through life weighted down by all the unexpressed tears and sad emotions. You can see them everywhere by their exhausted eyes, pallid skin, slumped postures and depressive moods that permeate even small joys in life. We live in a “dysfunctional pain/death phobic society” that tells us to “Put on a happy face, forget what happened, move on.” And you may also find that your friends are not helpful since they have accepted this vicious thinking completely. And needless to say, using marijuana will only mask the pain, and will never help to heal it. I speak from personal experience here too though it took me some time to really “get this.” For others, alcohol abuse is another common retreat from life’s realities, and the combination of the two is utterly toxic to healing.

The search continued for someone with whom I could open my heart, could express my grief – even repeating myself endlessly it seemed. I discovered Minister Teri Kierbel in Ventura, California, at the Place of Peace: her church and ministry. This was one of the most healing decisions, and efforts, I ever made. She helped me open up to life again. I later discovered meditation and how it embraces the healing magic of the soul. There is such peace in this practice. About meditation: there are numerous YouTube meditation sites. A book I also highly recommend is *The Grief Recovery Handbook* by John W. James and Russel Friedman, though the one relationship they miss is the one with our Self.

Not being able to afford California any more, I am now living in Eugene, Oregon. I create end-of-life [Family Legacy] videos as part of the Memories and Reflections Team for Eugene’s PeaceHealth Hospice program. I volunteer for their Grief Groups and occasionally sit vigil. And for a while, I volunteered with the Veterans Administration Chaplin’s caregiver’s group.

I am still sometimes involved with my interviewing skills class, which is posted on my website <http://drdenn.com/Core_Work_Preferences.pdf?0716>. It is based on me conducting over 5000 job interviews. This free, 9-page download is the distillation of all that I have experienced in working life, learned from others, and by teaching this course. Presenting this class at the South Central Los Angeles Vet Center enabled me to be invited to be part of the California delegation, second row far left, in the Vietnam Memorial dedication parade during President Reagan’s tenure. I conducted a demonstration class that day in our Nation’s Capital, Room 205, courtesy of the late Senator Alan Cranston. Congressional Senators and Representatives, of veterans related committees, sent their Chiefs of Staff or other members to attend.

Volunteering will open new horizons of a manifested life for you. Be a friend to yourself, reach out to an experienced counselor or grief group leader.

Your happiness depends upon it.

Then share what you’ve learned.

By the way, I no longer seek my destiny. I now realize that each decision I make, and have made, is what is creating my Soul fulfillment. I, and We, are a work in progress.

\*Psycho-Politics and Conflict Research Certificate specialty in the MPA (Master of Public Administration)

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)