

## Small

I was born at a very young age. I don't remember much of my early childhood. Too bad, since it was staged in Hawaii. I know that I went barefoot to and from private school through the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. I was one of the only "howlies" (white folks) in the school. Our house was only a couple lots from the beach in Kailua on the island of Oahu, still we had a pool in our backyard.

When I was about to go into the third grade we moved to Northern California. My dad seemed allergic to happiness, alcohol-less days, and staying in the same place for very long. We lived in 18 houses the 17 years that I lived with my parents. Sometimes we didn't unpack the boxes.

My dad was a handsome, athletic, highly intelligent, but tortured man. He eloped with my mom, both of them leaving a Stanford football game at half time to do so. He was a well-known swimmer in the San Francisco Bay Area and his dad heard of their elopement on KGO Radio. That's not a good way to tell your parents you've gotten hitched. They had two kids (Nancy and Joe), experienced WWII, had lots of jobs and houses and adventures before I was born 20 years later.

I called my mom to tell her that I had done the math when I was in college and figured out that I was "mistake." She preferred the word "surprise." Either way, I grew up like an only child-- a very spoiled and self-centered one. I basically got everything I wanted when I wanted it. We had the money and my mom and dad had already done the responsible parenting gig and were pretty tired by the time I came along. They loved me and showed it by giving me stuff.

I envied the other kids at school with siblings whose dads who didn't drink too much. Once he almost killed us both in a car when he made repeated stops for drinks along our road trip. I was scared and my mom was pretty mad when we got home. Since she was very mellow and co-dependent, I only remember seeing her that mad a couple of times.

Once I found my dad with a gun of mine trying to load it to kill himself in a drunken stupor. My mom gave me the choice of whether or not to leave him. I think I only was ten and voted for us to stay. I was too young to be making big-people choices like that and she should've put the ball in my court that day. Years later, a counselor asked me how that felt. They get paid to ask questions just like that. It was worth the fee that day, because I said it made me feel heavy and scared and responsible for fixing things in the world. He said that's probably not good for a kid to feel – or an adult.

There's more to being *Small*, but I think it's boring to read about someone's childhood that you don't even know as an adult. Maybe that's just me.

## Stupor

This word might describe most all homosapiens in their teen years. It's a kind of temporary insanity, a short-term stupidity (I think there might be a connection between the words, "stupor" and "stupid") between the 13th and 18th years old. Though I'd seen the alcohol-caused stupor right in front of me all my life, I felt strangely compelled to try it to see if I could have better results with it. Stupid? Right. All kinds of drugs followed—exponential stupid stupors. It was the hippie days, and I was drawn to the values, especially the "high" ones.

Seems like when we think we're the smartest we're really at our most moronic. I was pretty sure I was unique, different from the other burn-outs. I thought I could be stoned all the time and yet socially aware, politically radical, academically successful. It really only boiled down to being stoned all the

time, the other goals were on hiatus. It's all I had time and brain cells for. I didn't really mature much during those years.

I guess you don't feel so responsible to fix things when you're in a stupor. You're just too screwed up to do anything about your life and the screwed-up lives of people around you. Maybe it's an excuse to relax a little and take the ball and chain off. "I'm going to get high so I don't have to think about how messed up the world is. I'm going to destroy some brain cells so I won't have so many of them firing off all the time with worries and fears. I won't *be* any better, but I'll *feel* better about being so confused."

During that time I met some people formerly-in-a-stupor that had become Jesus followers. They told me of making the crossover from *stupor-to-saved*, how Jesus made them full enough inside so they didn't want to live in the stupor anymore. It seemed like a good thing for these guys because they were pretty out there. I wasn't nearly as, well, you know, stupid as any of them were, so it probably wouldn't work for me.

## Saved

That's such a provocative term – "saved." I told my mom I "got saved." She – always the supportive and compliant one – said, "*Oh, that's really nice, dear. ... What exactly is that?*" I wasn't exactly sure what exactly it was, so I guess I just used some of the new words I'd heard around my new post-stupor friends. Words like "forgiveness", "sin," "He paid the price," "Accept him" – and all that. Here's how it happened, at least what I remember of it from 40 years ago.

I started seeing this girl who skipped *stupor* and went straight to *saved*. I didn't even know a person you could do that, but she did, and told me about it when I asked. She definitely had something I didn't, but I wasn't convinced it had anything to do with God. I hung around her because I liked her even though she wasn't interested in being in any stupors with me. She wouldn't ride on my motorcycle with me because her mom told her not to. How weird is that? She didn't go to movies, I suspect because her pastor told her not to. Weirder yet, wouldn't have sex with me. I think that was because Jesus somehow told her not to that. Weirdest of all, I was intrigued. After a while I was in love and told her so. She told me she loved me too but not as much as she loved God. Soon after that she told me that he (God) told her to dump me so he could catch me. She did and he did.

Back a bit. One night I went over to her house to pick her up for a date. Our dates didn't consist of much since she wouldn't really do much of anything, and I didn't have any money to do it with anyway. But I got to her house and she said her brother-in-law wanted to meet with me to talk about something important. I had come over that night pretty high and didn't really want to go have this, or any other kind of talk with this guy. But I went. He told me about his experience from stupor to saved. I felt genuinely happy for him, and promised if I ever felt the need to do something like that, he'd be one of the first to know. Until then, maybe he could kinda drop it so I wouldn't have to worry about any more invitations for talks like this. He sort of complied and gave me a Bible telling me he was sure I was going to make a real good saved person sometime soon. He told me that the Gospel of John would be a good place to start and that I should read it when I was ready. I didn't think I ever would, not being much of a reader at the time or anything. But I thanked him and went home with the new Bible I never intended to read.

So, back to the day the girl told me she had to throw me back because I didn't love Jesus. I was devastated, but amazed by her sincerity. It seemed a little far-fetched to me that she communicated with God, but there was something about her confidence when she said he did. Maybe I wanted him to talk to me too.

The next day I took the Bible that I never intended to open with me to this beautiful, yet rustic spot overlooking a canyon where I used to get stoned. Only this day I skipped the stupor and just read the part that the brother-in-law suggested. I read the whole story that John wrote about Jesus. I have to say it was more of an experience than a reading. I can't explain it, but it was the first time I had been engulfed like that in a story. I wasn't just interested or intrigued. I was somehow *in* it – like I was there. This man was reaching out to me through his words on the pages of this book. I couldn't put it down or deny its draw on me. He knew me, and somehow I felt I kind of knew him too - in a distant sort of way. His way of knowing me wasn't distant at all though. I could picture him looking right through me, through all the stupors, identifying in me the real parts, and appealing to them.

The next day, I did what seemed the most logical. I called the girl to see if I could go to church with her. I had gone one time before and didn't like it at all. But this time I came to see if I could find the Jesus I'd encountered in his book the day before. Fortunately, I didn't over-think it and talk myself out of such a silly pursuit. Sure enough, when the pastor asked if anyone wanted to get acquainted with Jesus I walked to the front, got on my knees and asked him to reveal himself to me.

I was this long-haired stoner kneeling and crying my eyes out in the front of people I didn't know. It was the most breathtaking experience. I cried and cried and cried. Sad tears for the stupid stuff, happy tears for the new clean feeling, terrified tears for where the heck this was going to lead – cycling back to sad and happy tears. All of this right in front of strangers!

After what seemed like an eternity on my knees, the pastor, who was hovering over me the whole time saying some prayers, letting Jesus do his thing, finally asked me if I had a Bible. I told him I did. He told me to read the Gospel of John. I told him I did that already. He told me to keep reading. On the way out of the church I told the girl that I felt something different inside and was pretty sure this was going to last.

That night was church again. I was happy to go and see what happens next. The church youth group, met together first. I think those must've all pretty much skipped stupor and went right to saved. Later it seemed maybe some of them hadn't done either yet. Anyway, they met and played a game called, "Bible Baseball." I liked baseball and joined in. It's an indoor version where, instead hitting a ball with a bat, you answer Bible questions in order to get on base and eventually score runs. It so happened that most of the questions I got were related to the only part of the Bible I had ever read, or heard for that matter. So, I was blazing around the bases and scoring all kinds of runs in front of these kids who were pretty amazed a kid from the land of stupor could be so good at Bible Baseball.

Later, there was a church service, and since the teenagers had just gotten back from a church camp, they were going to stand up and tell the older people their camp "testimonies." The pastor asked me to join them on the stage and tell about what had happened to me in the morning service. I said, "Sure." It didn't really occur to me to be afraid. That was weird, because I never liked speaking in front of people before. In fact, I hated it. When it was my turn I said, *"I really don't know what to say, but it may turn out to be the most important thing I've ever said. I asked Jesus to come into my heart today."* Boy, you should have seen what I saw at that moment. I saw love. I saw it excreting from the people there, people who didn't know me from a hole in the wall. I found what they call salvation, and at the same time I adopted into a family. Big day!

## **Scorching**

I was lit and then I burned. Nothing ever seemed the same after that. I've never felt alone since. My thinking changed, my feelings were transformed, my actions and thoughts were all turned right side up. It was bazaar and terrifying and exhilarating all at the same time. My friends were all expecting it to wear off any day. I didn't think it would, but was afraid it might. It didn't. I was what they called in

those days, a “Jesus Freak.” And I pretty much loved it, even if my friends and family were not as into it as I was.

The first thing I noticed was that being in a stupor all the time had lost all its appeal. It wasn't so much of a, “I'm going to stop doing this even if it kills me.” It was more of a, “Why do I need to be stuporized when I can be in my right mind?” It really required no special effort or anything to stop. My friends were all still doing they'd always done and were puzzled why I had lost interest. I told them I was getting used to clear thinking and feeling real feelings, and that I liked it a lot.

One of the weirdest parts of those days of scorching with Jesus-flames was that I wanted to tell everyone I knew about what he's like. I thought for sure that everyone who didn't know would want to know. Once they heard, surely they'd want to cross over too! It was upsetting to find out that wasn't exactly the case. Most didn't (and still don't) really want to hear about it. It seemed funny to me that people who like to hear about all kinds of stuff religiously, philosophically, politically don't want to hear about Jesus. I learned real fast that this was going to change my social life a bit (a pretty big bit). But I was up for it – and still am. Jesus coming into my orbit wasn't going to mean popularity and success for me. But I was up for it – still am. He's worth it.

Another thing it meant was doing what he said, which I knew intuitively from the beginning. I knew in my “knower” that there would be major changes made in the way I lived my life. I would be stopping some things (not only the stupor thing, but a bunch of other stupid things) and I would be starting some other things that would be new to me. But it didn't feel harsh, because I had now experienced the kind of love that would be making these changes from the inside out. When someone has your best interest in mind it's so much easier to submit to their will.

Reading wasn't something I did for enjoyment or to gain knowledge. But when Jesus came in, reading the Bible became to me like eating after missing a couple meals. Not every time, but lots and lots of times, it seemed like he was speaking just to me when I read it. He was telling me stuff about him, about me, about him and me, and about others and me.

Pretty soon after making the crossover I came to the conclusion that God wanted me to live a life of service. Everyone who knows God is supposed to speak for God, but there's a calling for some to do it as a lifestyle. It's a special call for ordinary people. Here's how “the call” came to me.

Our youth group went once a month to a skid row mission in the seedy section of a small neighboring town. We'd go with this old (and I mean old) preacher from our church to tell our stories about crossing over to Jesus and sing songs. We called him, “Brother Vaught.” That's how you used to address the former generation of preachers. He was a tiny, feisty man with a withered arm. He claimed he got it from being shot by a railroad guard while hopping a train. The first time I went to the mission I stood up to talk, and by the time I was done I thought, “I should do this all the time.” I asked Brother Vaught how someone became a preacher. He told me you had to go to a Bible College and learn how to do it right. I didn't know there were such places, but took his word for it, and enrolled in one such place as soon as I could.

I had a marvelous time getting to know God on fast-forward. During those three years there was quite a learning curve. More and more of me was getting more and more immersed in more and more of him. And more and more of him was getting absorbed into more and more of me. I became increasingly convinced that God wanted me to devote myself to a life of service. I didn't have any idea what that all meant, but told him to count me in!

You know that girl who told me and showed me what Jesus was like? Here name is Vicki, and when were all of 20 years old when we got married. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time. We

loved each other and I couldn't see ever loving anyone else like I loved her. I never have. But were we were still kids ourselves. And I was so scorching with this Jesus-purpose, I wasn't very good at paying enough attention to her. More on that later.

I sponged up all I could in 3 years in this little all-about-the-Bible college. I got into it like I was never going to get another chance to learn any of this stuff. I loved him and loved studying his love letter.

One day he told me to finish college early and go back to my hometown and do whatever I could for him. We packed up (no kids yet) and moved back. I got paid \$350 a month to be the church's youth pastor, which made absolutely no difference one way or the other to me. I couldn't have cared less about money or acquiring stuff. Everything was about doing what he showed me to do. I continued making the mistake of not paying better attention to my wife, who I loved with all my heart. I just assumed she was on the same page as me about giving it all up for God. She was a trouper, but didn't have the same calling as mine.

Our little church was in a college town, and soon we were reaching a bunch of students who were hungry to know God and the Bible too. We would have "double-service" Bible Studies where we'd pack students into our apartment at 6:00PM for the first study and then 7:30 for the second.

After a while I began to feel like we were supposed to go somewhere else to start a church. I had a vision of me bowing before him in worship. Then someone saw me and bow next to me and then another and another. That was all I needed for marching orders. We packed up and went to Santa Cruz, California to start a church. We didn't know anyone there, but we invited people to our living room to learn about Jesus, and began a little fledgling church. We moved from there to a rented building, then to another, and then another. We kept growing out of the one before and had lots of fun watching God teach and change us all. Nothing was better than seeing people cross over, especially those going, as I had, from stupor to saved almost over night. We learned, we grew, we labored, we danced. Those were good days. We had very little money among us, but we bought a theater to worship in. We fixed it up and kept doing what we knew to do to make him happy and reach people.

My wife and I decided to start having children after 8 years of marriage. Good thing we waited that long, since we were so busy growing up ourselves. Then we had the two most beautiful babies in all the world (Luke, then Rebecca 3 years later). Besides the crossover miracle, the baby miracle is the most impressive. When God makes something, it's always good!

After some years of this scorching white heat, I think I heard him tell me to go start some more churches up the San Francisco Peninsula. Again we packed up (now with little kids in tow) and moved to the sleepy coastal town of Pacifica to begin again—yet another adventure with him at the lead. New community, new culture, new challenges – lots of new challenges. I sure matured a lot during this season of our lives. The kids were growing up, my wife and I were growing up, and the three churches we planted did some of the same. Gradually some of the heat subsided and some struggle began to occur.

## **Struggling**

It's not that my love for Christ subsided. My passion was intact. But it seemed the things for which I lived, the evidence of his presence was less tangible, less obvious. Maybe the heat became a bit more internal, and not so outward.

Over the years of trying to convey him to others, I encountered more and more resistance, some of which lived in me as well. It just didn't seem as easy as it used to be. He was real, just not as observable. He was working, just not as outwardly as before. I think he might have been giving me

opportunities to know him in ways I hadn't yet. I began to slow down enough to appreciate people, my friends, my family, and began getting in touch with more of my own humanness. Jesus began taking me by the hand to show me how to be a better friend of his and of others. Scorching, charging, advancing are more natural things for me. This other thing (relationships, friendships, marriage, child-rearing) takes patience and time and hard work.

With Jesus acting more subtly in my life, these issues of life became more prominent. Frankly, it's easier for me to be *spiritual* than *relational*, *productive* for God than *patient* with people, seeing Jesus at work on *others* than waiting for him to work on *me*. But since I'm not in charge of the agenda, all I could do was either go along with the new thing he was doing or whine a lot. I did some of the former and a good deal of the latter.

It's not that everything during these years was a struggle. We made many wonderful friends and learned a lot about God. While he was giving me a makeover, he was also working in people around me, pretty much in spite of me.

Vicki and I struggled to find our place with each other and with our kids during those years. We were changing as individuals (for the good for the most part) in such a way as to make it difficult for us to continue using the same rules of relationship with each other that we had before. Our kids were entering adolescence, and we were ill-equipped to negotiate those tumultuous years. We made it through, but not without the support of the Lord, our friends, and a good counselor.

My own personal insecurities in ministry became more and more apparent. As an adult child of an alcoholic I'm definitely Type-A, driven, and a person with high expectations of myself and others. We started yet another church in a neighboring community and a decade later returned to Santa Cruz to pastor the mother ship there. The snail's pace of the work we were doing became a nagging reminder that it really had nothing to do with my skill or my efforts or my abilities.

In 2001 one of our church's families was hit by a drunk driver and their 2 teenage girls were instantly killed. It was excruciating. A couple years later we experienced a child molestation within the membership of the church, which caused untold havoc among us all. We had one trial in the church after another. We *were* seeing the life of Jesus among us, but at the same time were embroiled in a battle with the enemy, unprecedented in my life of ministry. For the first time in 30 years of service our church was shrinking. We were growing as individuals, but shrinking in numbers. With my personality type, this was excruciating for me. I tend to take these kinds of things personally, and try to carry things I should be giving over to Jesus to carry. *Knowing* is one thing, *practicing* it is quite another. This is my struggle.

I wish I could entitle the next chapter of my story "Succeeding" or "Scorching #2. Maybe that's the stage after this next one that I haven't lived yet, but...

## **Suffering**

Having been exposed to the sufferings of others over the years (diseases, deaths, divorces, etc.), I had never experienced true suffering myself. That is, until recently. What I'm going to describe next, is, in my opinion, the real thing when it comes to suffering. At this writing I'm sort of on a hiatus from the overwhelming darkness (more on that later), so I'll speak of the suffering season in the past tense.

It was the most incredible season of loss I've ever experienced in my life. In a two-month period in 2008 I lost my wife, my ministry, my job, my insurance, my financial security, my house, and my

health. People who know me asked me if I'd read the Bible book called, "Job" lately. It's about a guy who lost virtually everything at the hand of Satan with the permission of God.

After 33 years of marriage my wife and I divorced. Of all my sufferings, this was by far the most terrible. I hurt so much on the inside, I thought a few times I would simply die of a broken heart. We'd been sweethearts since high school, and to have it end that way was hellish! I had to step down from my ministry simply because I couldn't pastor with such a huge hole in my heart. I went to stay with some old friends who absolutely saved my life by taking me into their home and nursing me back to health both emotionally and physically.

A couple of months after my wife and I split up, I fractured one of the vertebrae in my neck. At times it gave me such excruciating pain that I begged God to take me to heaven. The emotional pain of losing the love of my life sometimes spilled over into the physical agony and became unbearable.

To cap it all off, the doctors discovered that the cause of the fracture was bone cancer (Multiple Myeloma). If this pile up of challenges weren't so tragic it would almost be comical. I told a friend that I wasn't safe to walk down the street with. "There just might be falling pianos or anvils!"

He said, "I'm not worrying about that. I'm safe with you, because since you're the unluckiest guy I know, if something falls out of the sky, it's gonna fall on *you!*" He made a good point.

If I didn't know suffering before, I know it now, and because of this personal acquaintance, I've written quite a bit both in this site and my blog ([musingthemysteries.wordpress.com](http://musingthemysteries.wordpress.com)) on the topic of suffering and how I view God in light of it. Whether or not you agree with my meager musings on these themes and others, I hope you'll find them helpful in developing your own thoughts about the way God is and the best way to relate to him.

For the neck, I had a surgery to fuse five of my vertebrae with titanium rods and plates. For the cancer, I had radiation, chemo, and a bone marrow transplant at Stanford. The grueling transplant put me in what they call "Partial Remission." For the past two years (it's now January of 2013), thank God, I've been feeling quite well.

I've been so well that I moved to San Francisco to resume living a life of service. I call it my "simple single life of service" in which I do street ministry in a few of the City's neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poor, addicted, and marginalized. I'm having some of the most fun I've ever had in ministry. I have this "arrangement" with God that if I help pastors and other ministry leaders he won't make me be one. When asked what I do, I often say, "I'm a vagabond preacher," and loving it!

Jesus is still saving me from myself and beckoning me to live for his pleasure and praise. I don't know what's next for me, but I certainly do trust that *he* does. He's always been good to me, and no doubt will continue to be. Whether in this life here on earth, or in the next, I know there's another vista – a great one. I'm sure of it. I look forward to whatever he has in mind for me here or there.

Feel free to try to get in touch with me via email ([bwig@live.com](mailto:bwig@live.com)). If I'm in heaven, I won't be getting back to you. Otherwise, you can expect a reply from me (sooner or later).

Thanks for listening.

