CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction to Autoethnographic Vignettes

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Autoethnography is uncoincidentally well suited to creatively chronicling one’s Self-Leadership journey. What better way to study one’s Self-Leadership than to utilize a research methodology designed to analytically and autonomously study the self?

This chapter introduces the five extended autoethnographic “vignettes” (Harper, 2011, p. 55) that follow in chapters five through nine. I first discuss the impact that Self-Leadership has had on my life. I then provide an introductory autobiographical sketch of my life to date (1979-2013). This chronological, autobiographical timeline of my life’s journey so far contextually frames the five specific vignettes that follow, thereby weaving the completed Autoethnography into a holistically interconnected and coherent narrative. I follow this sketch by recounting my evolving journey as an autoethnographer, a journey that began a quarter century ago. I then introduce poetry as a key autoethnographer’s tool, a tool I use repeatedly throughout the vignettes. Finally, I discuss Frankl’s (2006) concept of the relativity of human suffering.

This introductory, autobiographical vignette, in concert with the five autoethnographic vignettes to come in chapters five through nine, represent my own Autoethnography, or scholarly personal narrative (SPN) (Nash, 2004). My purpose in delineating these vignettes is to provide a spectrum of examples that are both compelling and illustrative in demonstrating the meaningfulness of, and potentially positive impact that can occur through, the serious study, practice, and development of Self-Leadership strategies and skills.
Dickens (1859/1989) wrote that, “a wonderful fact to reflect upon, [is] that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other” (p. 11). Indeed, however intimate one’s interpersonal relationships may be, certain limitations persist in our capacity to understand another person on the same level that we can come to understand ourselves. The good news about Self-Leadership is that the goal is not to try and figure out the “mystery” of another person. Rather, it is to come, as Socrates famously remarked, to “know thyself.” To assist readers in accomplishing this purpose and vision in their own lives, I have opted to make public a plethora of personal information about myself, my thoughts, my feelings, and my life experiences that I hope will, in some way (small or large), positively influence the Self-Leadership exercise of others. My aim in doing so is to make myself a little less “mysterious” to others in hopes that knowing the details of my own life’s journey might lead readers to new and valuable insights into their own lives.

A persistent and inescapable reality of Self-Leadership, and of life in general, is that while we all need the help, support, instruction, and love of others, we nonetheless remain physically trapped inside of our own hearts, minds, and bodies, and must therefore wend our journey through the challenges of life as a being independent of all others. While we are externally influenced and impacted in countless ways by other people, forces, and things, ultimately, we must, at least on one level, make our way through life alone. In the words of Wilcox (in Cook, 1958/1997):

There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a long and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain. (p. 72)
No one experiences the exact same “pain” as another; perhaps this accounts for at least one reason why Dickens mused at the inherent mystery that exists between separate persons in this world. While we can sympathize, empathize, and in many cases even relate, to our fellow human beings, no one treads an identical journey to another. No one, therefore, can completely understand another. This is one of the reasons why I, as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, choose to believe in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which, I believe, empowers Him with the unique capacity to comprehend every human being’s journey through life with unmitigated perfection, a capacity that mortals clearly lack. Knowing that no one else can perfectly understand my journey, I choose to exercise faith that such a Being (Jesus Christ) exists, and can perfectly understand and relate to my life in all its nuanced details, having, I believe, experienced the totality of human experience as a vicarious proxy Himself.

I can never, in this world, perfectly understand the totality of your existence and experiences, nor can you perfectly understand mine. By sharing our respective experiences, we can, however, gain some measure of insight into each other’s journeys. Such insight may empower us to better understand and appreciate the mysterious lives of each other as we attempt to solve—at least in part—the mystery of our own. Perhaps the sharing of my story might in some way aid you in your own quest for self-understanding and self-improvement. Perhaps by observing the footprints of my own treacherous pathway through life, you might draw strength to press forward in your own personal journey—not because you will follow my footprints precisely, but because the knowledge and sight of another’s struggles, especially when those struggles were successful, can provide you with an anchor of hope. In the words of Longfellow (1912):
Lives of great men all remind us
   We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
   Footprints on the sands of time ;—

Footprints, that perhaps another,
   Sailing o’er life’s solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
   Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
   With a heart for any fate ;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
   Learn to labour and to wait. (p. 3)

While my aim is not to insinuate that I am a great man, I do wish earnestly that
my footprints, however flawed, might, in some small way, prove helpful to others.

**The Impact of Self-Leadership on My Life**

When I reflect on the impact Self-Leadership has had in my life, my heart echoes
the words of Thoreau (2001):

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to
elevate his life by conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a
picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far
more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which
we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the
highest of arts. (p. 74-75)

For me, one of the greatest freedoms and opportunities in life is the chance we
have as individuals to consciously design our lives over time through the exercise of
personal agency in what we choose to think about, say, and do. Indeed, these three
freedoms are the only real inalienable freedoms and rights that we possess in life. It has
been argued that every individual is *who*, and *what*, they are in large measure because of
the cumulative effect of their thoughts, speech, and actions. This freedom makes us
sovereign over our own individual, metaphorical worlds (Jensen, 2005).
Such freedom and power has often been a perpetually renewing means of enormous satisfaction, excitement, and hope for me in my life. It has been a primary driving force behind overcoming difficult challenges I have faced, and personal weaknesses I have struggled to transcend. It has motivated my commitment to embrace the work ethic required for success in multiple life arenas, and it has contributed significantly to all worthwhile achievements in my life. It has sustained my will to persist in tasks that were dauntingly difficult, and it has buoyed my faith in sources of help—seen and unseen—along the way. It has inspired me to dream big, pursue my dreams, and then to realize many of them. Moreover, I know it will yet contribute meaningfully to the accomplishment of many more dreams I have for myself, my family, and my organization.¹ Finally, this freedom reminds me of the duty I have to help others in their own Self-Leadership journey along my way.

I love the fact that I can call the shots in my own life. I cherish the truth that if I don’t like something, I have a measure of power to begin the process of changing myself to in-turn begin altering my circumstances—over time—to a more desirable state of being. I feel empowered by the knowledge that in the final analysis, there is no value in blaming anyone else for the results I get, or do not get, in my life. While I cannot control what other people do, and while I am continually exposed to natural forces outside my control (i.e. the weather, natural disasters, the rise and fall of financial markets, governments, et cetera), including the thoughts, speech, and actions of others, which all have the potential to negatively impact my life in a variety of ways at sundry times, yet I firmly believe that the biggest variable in terms of personal results and the ultimate

¹ I am the Founder and CEO of Freedom Focus LLC, a training organization dedicated to the proliferation of efficacious Self-Leadership practices and education by persons everywhere. It was incorporated in 2005.
direction of my life is my own exercise of Self-Leadership. Of all the persons, forces, entities, and/or things that could potentially control me, I take great pride and satisfaction that ultimately, I Am Sovereign in terms of my own life’s attitude, actions, and direction. While forces outside my control will always play a role in the way things go, this role will always ultimately prove to be a subordinate one because the primary role rests with my own self-sovereignty to choose my thoughts, speech, and actions.

“I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it.”

– Charles W. Swindoll

Even in extreme historical (or current) cases when an individual (or group)’s God-given rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” has been compromised or revoked, there yet remains what Frankl (2006) calls “the last of the human freedoms—... to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (p. 66).

“We are responsible for our own effectiveness, for our own happiness, and ultimately, I would say, for most of our circumstances.”

– Stephen R. Covey

In confronting the abject conditions engendered by the diabolical exercise of fascist totalitarianism enforced by Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich in World War II, Frankl observed firsthand the poignant premise that bad things do indeed happen to good people as he and his fellow prisoners labored and languished in the hell that was Auschwitz and

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2 I Am Sovereign is the title of my first book (Jensen, 2005).
3 United States’ Declaration of Independence.
4 Covey (1989), p. 93
other Nazi concentration camps. He experienced the temporary loss of literally
everything tangible that he had worked to earn up to that point in his life. In the midst of
such degrading squalor, Frankl posed a fundamental Self-Leadership oriented question:
“Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?” (p. 65). He then
answers his own question within a context of his own observations of, and experiences
with, differing chosen responses of various self-leaders in the concentration camp.

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. The
experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were
enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be
overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and
physical stress.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through
the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have
been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken
from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s
attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the
opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would
or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very
self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the
plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded
into the form of the typical inmate. (p. 65-66)

And thus we arrive at the fundamental responsibility of Self-Leadership, or of the
self-leader: to develop one’s capacity to be able to proactively choose one’s response
(implicitly positive and effective) to what happens to one rather than reacting (implicitly
negative or ineffective) out of habit or indiscipline (Covey, 1989). Covey (1989)
teaches⁵ that between stimulus (what happens to one) and response (how one responds to
what happens) there is a space wherein an individual can formulate a chosen response.

⁵ This was not Covey’s original idea. He originally came across it in an unknown book in a university
library in Hawaii in the late 1970s. It was he, however, who made the concept famous.
As imperfect human beings with numerous forces at play in the variable filled maelstroms (real, perceived, or metaphorical) of mortality, this readily comprehended credo can prove consistently confounding in one’s attempts to put into practice, and the phrase \textit{easier said than done}, readily comes to mind. Yet the attempt to \textit{do} is the essence of Self-Leadership aspiration, and the more effective a self-leader gets at effectively managing the \textit{space} between stimulus and response, the better one gets at Self-Leadership, and the higher one will rise in his or her Self-Leadership Efficacy.

My life, as with arguably any life, is an ongoing story about the perpetual struggle to discipline my own responses to life’s myriad problems, pains, perplexities, and failures.\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, a primary \textit{storyline} of my life has been my ongoing journey with my own Self-Leadership from both a philosophical and practical standpoint. This journey began at a very young age, as the following journal entry of my Father’s illustrates.

\textbf{Fri. July 10, 1981}\textsuperscript{7}

Cute things happened this afternoon. I took Jordan with me to the bank to make an apartment deposit. Left him in the car while I went in. When I came out, he had opened the door of the car, leaned out, pulled down his britches and shorts and was proceeding to make a puddle on the asphalt. The last time he was with me at the Exxon Station I got a little upset with him for going on the seat. He did it right this time. Sure was cute. He was right proud of himself.

As I have engaged in the in-depth self-reflection of my past required to produce this Autoethnography, I have discovered that my education in, and practice of, Self-Leadership has been inextricably linked with every truly meaningful event, process, learning moment, and achievement in my life. In short, it has, in one way or another, defined the majority of my waking moments in my life since I was seven years old.

\textsuperscript{6} Boss and Sims Jr. (2008) have “develop[ed] a theoretical perspective on how emotion regulation and Self-Leadership can help move the experience of personal failure toward recovery” (p. 135).

\textsuperscript{7} As I was born on August 21, 1979, this puts me about five weeks shy of my second birthday.
Before launching headlong into the autoethnographic data that describes many of these events, processes, learning moments, crucibles, and achievements, I introduce it with a summary sketch of my life to date.

**Introductory Autobiographical Sketch:**
A Chronological Overview of My Life-to-Date

This section prefaces the forthcoming autoethnographic vignettes with a chronological overview of my life’s journey up to the present year: 2013. The purpose of this overview is to give the reader a basic historical and sequential sense of my life’s journey up to the age of 33-and-a-half. Because subsequent vignettes focus mainly on the past two decades of my life (the OCD years), this overview places greater emphasis on, and includes more details from my early, pre-OCD, years, which consist of the first dozen years of my life. It also provides a glimpse into my life’s educational, work, and service experiences up to the present.

**Birth**

I was born on August 21, 1979 in Monticello, Utah into a middle class, Caucasian family. I was the sixth of seven children, and the last of five boys.

**Influence of Parents and Siblings**

I grew up in a two-parent (mother and father) household that was very loving. My parents and siblings were good to me, and promoted efficacious personal leadership and responsibility both implicitly and explicitly through both precept and example. A culture of excellence and a great deal of positive peer pressure existed among my siblings

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8 Middle-class as judged by my father and mother’s cash flow income. However, my dad was a landowner and in terms of assets and net worth, would have been considered upper-middle class.
to accomplish worthy goals and make our parents proud of us. We were not wealthy financially, but we were exceedingly rich in relationships. We all supported each other; we were there for each other. While my parents’ relationship eventually failed, leading to divorce after 37 years, their marriage was relatively healthy and strong for the majority of the time my siblings and I lived at home. It was not until the mid-late 1990s that my parents’ relationship started to markedly deteriorate. By this time, five of my older siblings had already left home and my little sister and I were already in high school.

My parents were active in our lives. They supported us in our school, church, scouting, and extracurricular activities. They taught us common courtesy and etiquette, respect, honesty, discipline, courage, and many other virtues that have benefitted my life and Self-Leadership Efficacy. They expected us to remember our “pleases” and “thank-you’s.” They expected us to work hard in school and try our best in other activities we were involved in. Yet they flexibly made concessions for individual personality differences. For example, although they were concerned about my poor grades in high school, which were noticeably worse than all of my other siblings, they opted to not explicitly punish me for it. They seemed to sense that I needed to learn the hard way on that score. My Dad simply told me, “Jordan, the day will come when you will have to suffer the consequences of your decisions to underachieve in your schoolwork.” He was right! A few years later, I received a rejection letter from the University to which I had applied. My sub-par grades and average college entrance exam test score came back to bite me.

My parents supported us in extracurricular sports and/or interests we chose to participate in, but they never pressured us into activities we did not individually desire to
pursue. The exception to this was the family requirement of taking at least two years’ lessons in a musical instrument of our choice. Looking back, I am as grateful for this general requirement (I learned to pluck out a few notes on the piano and became more educated in musical theory) as I am thankful for the two-year limit placed thereon (I was not destined to become a concert pianist and was eager to use my time pursuing other interests). My parents expected us to pull our weight around the house by doing household chores, or “stewardships” as my Mother called them. They expected us to conduct ourselves in a manner that both they and us could be proud of. We were not perfect. We had our share of sibling squabbles. I especially found getting along with my little sister, Jessie, difficult, although I actually spent more time with her than any of my other siblings because of the proximity of our ages as the sixth (me) and seventh (Jessie) of seven children with a mere 26 months between us.
Figure 3. Handwritten sticky-notes from my Mom dating back to the late 1980s and/or early 1990s.
Figure 4. My brother Joe on his LDS mission in Ecuador, S.A. (1990-1991).

Figure 5. Envelope from letter Joe sent me while on his LDS Mission to Ecuador (1990-1991).
Figure 6. Excerpt from Joe’s mission letter, dated April 1991.

Figure 7. Excerpt from Joe’s mission letter, dated October 1991.

Figure 8. Excerpt from Joe’s mission letter, dated October 1991.
Influence of America’s Founding Fathers

I was raised to honor not only my Mormon progenitors and other LDS leaders, but also the founders of American democracy. This was in part influenced by my Mormon upbringing, since generally speaking, Mormons are culturally quite patriotic. This upbringing was accentuated by my own interest in history and a personal proclivity to study the lives of men and women I viewed as being exceptionally great. As a result, I have been significantly influenced by what I have both passively and actively learned about men and women such as Joseph, Hyrum, and Mary Fielding Smith, Brigham Young, George Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Florence Nightingale, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ronald Reagan.

Figure 9. As a Mormon boy, I was taught the virtues of religious freedom, my own faith, and the country that made both possible. Photo is of the American Flag flying near the Salt Lake City LDS Temple, and was a gift from Scott Peterson, a mission friend of mine from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Peterson took the photo circa 2000 and is published here with Peterson’s permission.
Figure 10. Next to a Benjamin Franklin statue in Philadelphia in August 1991.

Figure 11. Above the head of Benjamin Franklin’s grave in Philadelphia in August 1991.

Figure 14. At the Lincoln Monument in Washington D.C. with my wife (girlfriend at the time) Lina in May 2007.
Influence of Writers, Thinkers, Philosophers, and Poets

I was also greatly influenced by many of the great writers and poets I learned about in school, or through the perusal of my own father’s home library (he was an English teacher), and also the home library of my maternal Grandmother, which boasted a collection of literally thousands of books collected in large part by my late maternal Grandfather, a university professor of speech and drama.

Early Years in Monticello, Utah

I lived in Monticello, Utah until age seven, and attended kindergarten at Monticello Elementary School. In my early years, I was very much a “Daddy’s boy.” I was crazy about my Dad. I wanted to go wherever he went, and do whatever he did, including running a chain saw. This implanted within me multiple ambitions along the lines of my father’s work in the fields of construction and contracting. My first ambition was to become a garbage collector, and found myself continually enamored by the sanitation trucks that came to collect our trash each week. I would “play garbage man” at home and wait patiently for them on garbage day so I could watch the men load and then compact (my favorite part) the garbage. This desire was subsequently supplanted by other occupational interests such as laying concrete, plumbing, and construction—all endeavors I had observed from related tradesman who came to our house, or through work activities I had helped my father with. I adored my dad, and the feelings were mutual, as the following entries from Dad’s journal illustrate.

Tues. June 1, 1982

When I got home I ate, had a nap, and then took Jordan for a ride on the motorcycle. He really likes to ride with Dad on the bike. He drives his mother

9 Dad wisely declined my eager request to run his chainsaw until I was old enough to safely handle it.
crazy, what with being constantly into things, or disappeared. I crave the little “Mutt.” I think he is going to be a whiz if we can just channel all that energy into the right direction.

Sept. 20, 1982

Worked in the office until about noon and then took Jordan and went up to the Mountain in the Jeep to have a look at the wood situation. Found several good spots and enjoyed Jordan as I hiked around looking. He is such a precious spirit and he is crazy about his Dad. I have a very large tender spot in my heart for that little boy.

Sept. 23, 1982

I got packed … and headed for Provo via Ephraim. Jordan cried his eyes out and wanted to go with Dad, as he always does. Really tore my heart out to leave him wailing on the sidewalk. Felt very alone.

Was a long drive to Ephraim. Several times on the trip my eyes would mist up as I would think of Jordan standing crying on the steps as I drove away. What that little boy means to me is beyond description. I have never had a child so devoted as he and it is very difficult to leave him…

Fri. October 22, 1982

My beautiful wife and Jordan and Jessie were waiting at the airport for us. Jordan was almost hysterical with glee.

I got my first paid job at age five helping my dad and older brothers with the construction of a family cabin on land owned by my dad. My job position-title was “fetch-it” and my job description was to “fetch” whatever tool my dad or brothers needed at any given moment. I was paid $40 for whatever help I contributed throughout the entire summer. I was free to spend the first $20 however I wished. The second $20 dollars went into a savings fund (care of my Dad) for the LDS mission I planned to someday serve at age 19. My father recorded the occasion in his journal:

Wed. September 11, 1985

I recently paid Jordan for his summer of work at our “fetch-it-man.” Put $20 in his missionary and paid him $20 by check. Pauline wanted to have a copy of the
check, to put in his book, and so I took it to the office and every day since Jordan has asked me about it. Today, he came up and as serious as his little countenance has ever been said, “Dad, when you make that copy of my check, I want you to make an extra copy, so I will have a little extra to spend”…. Oh, wouldn’t that be nice. That comment is vintage Jordan.

![Figure 15](image15.png)

*Figure 15.* Copy of my first paycheck for summer work, 1985. Twenty additional dollars went into my mission fund.

As a child, I was healthy, active, energetic, and precocious. A daddy’s boy, I was a product of my rural surroundings.

![Figure 16](image16.png)

*Figure 16.* On a cattle ranch

![Figure 17](image17.png)

*Figure 17.* Fort building

![Figure 18](image18.png)

*Figure 18.* My Tademark jeans ‘n’ boots

Figure 20. Presiding/speaking at a funeral for a dead bird.
Figure 21. On an Emerson-Brantingham Big 4 Tractor (circa early twentieth century) in the Monticello City Park following a re-paint job for my older brother’s Eagle Scout Project (1985).

Fri. May 24, 1985

Jordan and I concreted the pole in and that was the highlight of the week for Jordan. I have never seen a kid that loves to play (work) in concrete like Jordan.”

Figure 22. Working (playing) with mortar, circa 1984-1985.
Growing up as a Mormon provided me with many opportunities to learn and grow in the art of instruction and oratory at a very young age.
Some excerpts from my Dad’s journals may reveal some early hints of what would eventually develop into a lifelong, passionate interest in, and pursuit of, Self-Leadership Efficacy through the practice of planning, hard work, enthusiasm, optimism, determination, persistence, and creativity. Such proclivities were influenced greatly by what I was taught about the American founders, my own progenitors, and my religion as well as the examples of my parents, siblings, and extended family. For example, my father was a very ambitious, hard-working man, and my mother was not a whit behind him. Their examples naturally instilled the values of hard work and ambition in me and my brothers and sisters. Consider the following excerpts from my dad’s journal, which document early introductions to Self-Leadership oriented opportunities, quoted in chronological order:

**Thurs. October 22, 1981**

After school today we cut wood. Jordan assisted, and was quite a helper, considering it was his first bash.
Sat. May 12, 1984

Spent the day at the Natural Bridges with my four sons (Paul stayed home) on our annual Ward Father and Sons outing…. Jordan was a little trooper. He kept right up with us the whole day with hardly a word of complaint.

Wed. October 3, 1984

Jordan and I went into the shop and finished the wood box. Jordan built a “picture frame” out of split shingles. When he hauled it into the house to show everyone, Joe about “split” but such is the enthusiasm of my “Bud” Jordan.

Wed. October 31, 1984

Jordan helped me all day @ the cabin (chose me over the Halloween party at the play school –wow!) We got the footers laid out. Jordan held the transit rod and the tape all morning –couldn’t have gotten along without him.

Thurs. December 6, 1984

Jordan and I worked from 10-5:30 today.

Sun. June 1985

Jordan gave his first talk in Primary [church] and told about planning his garden. He is a character, old Jordan.

Tues. June 25, 1985

Jordan must have asked me 50 times today if the new “Tracto” was going to come. Maybe tomorrow…. Everything is up in Jordan’s little garden now, and he is so proud and excited about it.

Thurs. September 26, 1985

Jordan and I got a load of wood tonight all by ourselves.

Mon. December 16, 1985

Tended Jordan (who is a little sick with another cold) while Pauline went for a permanent. We had a great time doing exercises, playing UNO and so on. He is so full of life and enthusiastic about everything.

Wed. April 30, 1986

Jordan helped Grandma Smith plant the rest of her garden.


Sat. July 26, 1986

Pauline and I watched Paul and Jordan run the 5k race from the Lake to the Church. Paul won first in his age group and 2nd overall with a time of 17:56. Jordan, bless his game little heart ran his first 5k in 26:30 and stole the show. He beat a lot of adults and other youngsters, and has vowed that someday he will be a lot better than even his big brother Paul.

Accompanying my enthusiasm and other Self-Leadership proclivities were a mischievous, hyperactive side that I would have to learn to bridle.

Fri. April 17, 1981

Things have been pretty quiet around the house with the kids all gone. Have really enjoyed having a few quiet moments with Pauline. The moments are never very quiet unless Jordan is asleep however. We have certainly not had a child like Jordan. He never stops getting into things for five minutes.

Wed. March 3, 1982

Spent the evening at the house. Fixed the toilet that has been plugged in the kids upstairs bathroom. Turned out to be Jordan’s plastic Urinal guard that was the culprit. No, Jordan was the culprit, no doubt, for throwing it down the toilet. It took me an hour to take the toilet up, drain it, and pull that guard out with pliers and then put the toilet back, clean up the bathroom and shower. That kid has caused me a lot of expense and trouble the last week, what with a $40 bill for the tack in the chain-saw and now the toilet.

Sat. March 12, 1983

Rented a video from the Abajo called “The Devil and max Devlin.” Invited [several friends and family members] over. It was noisy with the little kids, but we had a good time. Jordan didn’t shut up 2 minutes the whole time.

Fri. April 29, 1983

Jordan talked the whole time [we were cleaning up the shop]. I love that little boy so much, but oh how he can get on one’s nerves with his incessant chatter.

Fri. August 12, 1983

Went to the dump and unloaded all the junk from the overhang cleanup at the house and all grandma’s grass clippings. Jordan was so cute helping me unload
that trailer. He is so anxious to help that he is a pain most of the time, but I love
the little rascal so much it hurts at times.

**Wed. April 25, 1984**

Went home at four. Cleaned the shop. David and Wayne started removing sod
around the shrubs along the tennis court. Paul and Joe got in a fight, and Jordan
pounded and chopped around the shop. Jordan is the most loveable ‘pain’ we
have had.

**Mon. June 10, 1985**

I stopped to take a picture of a field of bluebells on the way home and about had a
coronary when Jordan disappeared. He had fallen down a deep post hole, and was
scared but unhurt when pulled to safety. I hope that kid reaches puberty!

**Sat. June 29, 1985**

Joe and I mowed the lawn at Park Plaza. Jordan insisted on running one of the
big mowers and sheared off a sprinkler head in the process.

**Wed. August 28, 1985**

It was a long ride. Jordan was his usual hyper-active little self, and I was ready
for the rubber room when we finally pulled in.

**Family Move to Mesa, Arizona**

In August 1986, my family moved to Mesa, Arizona, where I lived until the end
of my seventh grade year (1993).
Figure 26. My mom, siblings, and me (I am in blue) acting silly (as we often did) in front of our new home in Mesa circa (1986-1987). Dad is taking the picture.

Figure 27: My family, circa 1989. I am on the front row (far right) standing in front of my sister Jody.
My family’s move to Mesa proved to be a significant turning point in my life. Up to this juncture of time, I had mostly been a Daddy’s boy, deeply immersed in the rural atmosphere Monticello so amply afforded. The move to Mesa introduced me to urban life, or at least suburban life, with a concomitant set of experiences and opportunities relatively removed from those I’d had in the country. I also grew closer to my mom during these years. While I wouldn’t call myself a “Mama’s Boy” because of the negative connotations of said appellation, my relationship with my Mother did grow increasingly salient in the City.

*Figure 28. With Mom in front of our Mesa home.*
Now that I was a “City Slicker,” you might say I traded in my jeans and boots for a pair of shorts and sneakers, and sometimes, even a shirt and tie.

Figure 29. At my desk in second grade. Notice my Franklin Day Planner atop it.

Instead of all my close friends being from white, middle-class families, as was the case in Monticello, my group of friends in Mesa was more diverse. At one point in elementary school, in fact, three of my best friends were non-white (African American, Iranian, and Laotian).

In Mesa, I also began to learn about and take interest in the white-collar world. This paralleled the advent of my elementary education, which, of course, included the life changing opportunity of learning how to read and write. From this point on my erstwhile fascination with blue-collar endeavors were peripherally repositioned in the wake of a growing inclination to pursue work of a mental rather than a physical nature. Following my pattern of interest based on new discoveries about the world around me, I soon
developed a variety of jejune ambitions for my future. For example, I began to take interest in legal and other formal proceedings. This was influenced by my study of famous American lawyers (such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln), and also by the formality I observed in Colonel Oliver North and others involved in the Iran Contra proceedings being aired on television in the late 1980s. I had no conception of the meaning behind such proceedings, but I thought Colonel North looked sharp in his uniform, and my curiosity was captured by the seeming importance of the affair.

The Influence of My Brothers

I also grew enthusiastically enamored by an interest in foreign languages. This was largely influenced by the return of my oldest brother Paul from his LDS Church mission to Seoul, South Korea in 1989. Over the course of his two-years missionary service, he had become proficient in reading, writing, and speaking the Korean language. I all but worshipped my four older brothers (who were 8, 9, 9 [the twins], and 12 years my senior), and desired ardently to ape their interests and activities. I was exceedingly blessed to have older brothers that were good and kind to me. They nicknamed me “Bud,” and constantly affirmed my worth and potential. Because of the space between us in age, they were as much mentors, close uncles, or even surrogate fathers to me as they were brothers.

Image 31. With Joe, my brother closest to me in age, circa 1989.
Dear Jordan,

I love you! I hope your getting excited for school. You are going to do so great next year. you the best little brother a big brother could ever have! And I mean that Jordan... always do what is right, and always let mother and Dad help you with any problems that you ever have. Thanks for all the wonderful things you have
With Paul’s help, I learned the Korean alphabet well enough to read by sounding out the words. I also learned some vocabulary words, how to say a simple prayer in Korean, and also memorized the first Article of Faith\textsuperscript{10} of the LDS Church in Korean, something I can still recite verbatim by memory to this day.

\textit{Figure 33}. A Christmas letter from my brother Paul, circa 1987 or 1988.

\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{Articles of Faith} of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-Day Saints consist of 13 fundamental doctrinal points of the newly formed church as outlined by Church Prophet-President Joseph Smith in 1842 in a letter to John Wentworth, the editor of the newspaper, \textit{The Chicago Democrat}. 
A Love of Learning and Knowledge

I also began to take interest in history, politics, literature, and an assortment of other intellectual pursuits. I also became increasingly ambitious and socially savvy. For example, my idea of selecting a class president in first grade was met with enough classroom enthusiasm and teacher assent that an election was held. I garnered the most votes and can still recall the sense of pride and importance that beamed in my heart standing at the helm of Mrs. Dockery’s first grade class. This event and my growing knowledge of politics fueled my desire to someday be President of the United States, an ambition that I held off-and-on for many years before finally coming to my senses and discovering my true voice as a writer and educator. I also came to realize that I probably was, by nature and practice, far too honest and introverted to ever be an effective politician.

Whether it was blue-collar inclinations in Monticello or white-collar enthusiasms in Mesa, I was eager in my ambition to seek out knowledge of all kinds wherever and whenever I could, and I was fortunate in that my parents, siblings, relatives, and teachers were enthusiastic in imparting whatever knowledge to me that they could. By the time I was about nine years old, the most common gifts (birthday, Christmas, et cetera) I received from family members were books. Receiving a new book was always a thrilling experience for me. By the time I was 23 years old, I had amassed a personal library of over 500 volumes, many of which were gifts from family members. My maternal grandmother had a collection of books called *Power Tales* that retold in simple language the stories of venerable historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Ronald Reagan, George Washington Carver, and others. My two favorite *Power Tales* were the stories of
Abraham Lincoln and Florence Nightingale. My grandmother also had a sizable library in her home that contained several thousand books on subjects that ranged from literature and philosophy to history, religion, fiction, poetry, and science. Though I was only in elementary school, I ardently adored her library, and found myself greatly drawn to books, the authors who wrote them, and the subjects addressed in their pages. To me, the greatest people, events, and things in the world were spoken of in books like the ones in my grandmother’s library.

**Pretending**

My ambitions at such early ages forced me to do a lot of *pretending*. It is tough to be a big hitter in the game of human affairs when you are seven or eight years old, so I often pretended that I was older, and had much greater opportunities and responsibilities than I actually did. This played out in interesting ways that I will describe in greater detail in Chapter Nine. Perhaps all children do their share of *pretending*, and I was no different. For example, my little sister and/or my cousins would play “house,” but more often, we would play “office.” Prior to learning to read, one of my favorite pastimes was rifling through my Dad’s office trashcan to see what “office” paperwork treasures I might mine, and boy did I find some gems! From discarded checkbooks and check registers, to business cards, contracts, and even unopened junk mail, I garnered quite a collection for our own make-believe office. I even made a business card for myself:
Soon after moving to Mesa, I was also introduced to what has since become a lifelong hobby: playing and watching sports. It all began with the legendary Boston Celtics of the mid-late 1980s: Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, Dennis Johnson, Robert Parrish, and Danny Ainge.\textsuperscript{11} I soon got my own basketball hoop and became convinced I would someday play in the NBA myself. I discovered at school a talent for athletics that garnered for me a considerable degree of personal satisfaction and positive social attention, which did much to shape my youthful identity. When choosing teams to play football or basketball out on the playground, I was usually one of the first ones picked, a fact that boded well for my childhood identity, social life, and self-esteem. Sociality came naturally to me in elementary school and I enjoyed much popularity among both students and teachers. After being elected president of my first grade class, I won elections to represent my class in the school student council in third, fourth, and fifth grade. In fifth grade, I even became quite popular with the girls, and was asked to “go

\textsuperscript{11} Ainge, the current president of basketball operations for the Boston Celtics, is also a high profile Mormon. When he later played for the Phoenix Suns in the 1990s, I heard him speak at one of the local church buildings near my home in Mesa—a thrilling experience. There was “standing room only” in the Church that evening as members, and perhaps non-members alike, flocked to hear the great pro-basketball player speak, free of charge!
out”¹² by three different girls that year. I respectfully declined all their offers, considering it the right thing to do in light of my tender age and personal standards influenced by my family and religious convictions.¹³ This was a high point for me socially in my young life. The demonic tentacles of OCD had not yet grasped me in its foreboding clutches, nor had the unsightly homeliness of puberty-stricken adolescence arrived. At this stage, I could not have possibly anticipated the impending drought of female admiration and attention that was looming in the near future, and which would plague me so persistently for fourteen years (age 13-27). Had I been blessed with a sense of what was to come, I might have basked in the glow of my many elementary school “moments in the sun” a little more than I did. Suffice it to say, these pre-OCD years were some of the best years of my life, and in terms of mental hygiene and overall happiness, they were the best years of my life.

**Academic Highs**

Beginning in first grade, I discovered a penchant for academic achievement. I received high marks (almost exclusively A’s and B’s—and mostly A’s) throughout all my elementary school years. I was academically ambitious, often yearning for more challenging assignments and homework than I was receiving. I was reasonably well behaved, but socially comfortable enough to fuel a propensity towards showmanship and being a class clown, which occasionally got me into trouble.

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¹² Become her boyfriend.
¹³ The LDS Church counsels their young people to avoid dating until age 16, and to avoid exclusive, romantic pairing up until after high school and/or post full-time missionary service.
Figure 35. Comments from my first grade teacher on the back of my report card, 1986-1987.
Figure 36. Second grade report card, 1987-1988.
My sixth grade report card, 1991-1992. Notice the ‘B’ grades in math. In fifth grade, I had begun to struggle in math for the first time. It was the beginning of an extended falling from grace in the subject I had excelled at in grades 1-4. Math remained challenging for me throughout the remainder of my academic career. I was innately good with numbers (math) and letters (English), but once the two got mixed up together (pre-algebra, algebra, et cetera), I lost the “touch” I possessed for simple arithmetic.

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14 Teacher’s name included with permission of Ms. Nell Jean.
Figure 38. Comments from my sixth grade teacher, Ms. Nell Jean,\(^{15}\) 1991-1992.

\(^{15}\) Name included with the permission of Ms. Nell Jean.
In first grade, I started out in an average reading group, but was motivated to move up because my best friend was in the advanced group. Before the end of the year, I had reached my goal. This improvement in reading is evidenced by my improved reading grades as the year went on.

My early successes in reading and writing continued throughout elementary school and beyond, although my later English grades in High School did not always reflect my potential in the subject. I was also very good at math in grades 1-4, and consistently
finished among the top students in timed tests in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

Throughout elementary school, I often lived vicariously through my brothers, thereby gaining a second hand flavor for the experience of high school academics, athletics, and even sociality, including dating. As I have reflected back to my elementary years, they have often seemed to me to be more psychologically reflective of a typical high school experience than that of an elementary experience.

**Boyhood Interests and Pursuits: My Utopian Childhood Bubble**

Outside of school, my Mesa years were largely spent in the typical pursuits of an LDS boy of elementary school age. I was active in church and the Boy Scouting program, and had earned the rank of Life Scout by grade seven. I played video games, sports, and went swimming with my friends. I watched television, played games, and otherwise spent time at home with my family. I also enjoyed reading and adventuring. In 1991, the movie *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* was released. The film had an unusually profound impact on my life. I spent many hours making and or buying and then shooting bows and arrows. We had a *palo verde* tree in our front yard from which I harvested wood for my homemade bows. I used broken tent pole sections as arrows prior to buying real one’s. Kevin Costner’s portrayal of Robin Hood also got me thinking more about the concept of leadership, a topic I had been interested in since first grade.

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16 One rank below Eagle, which is the highest rank a boy scout can achieve.
17 My Mom didn’t support our getting a *Nintendo*—the popular gaming system of the era—but I managed to play plenty at my friend’s homes.
I was formally unemployed, but did have household “stewardships” (chores). I also helped my Dad from time-to-time with his side business in Mesa that involved running advertisement fliers for, and then building shelves in customer’s garages. He did this to supplement his modest income as a high school English teacher. My basic needs were always fulfilled, but there was often a sense that money was tight and an underlying concern that there might not be enough. Since my Dad was a schoolteacher, we would spend the summers in Utah, where I spent a lot of time with cousins in Monticello and Provo. I enjoyed the summer days I spent in Monticello, where my cousins and I enjoyed many outdoor adventures on the land that my Dad owned, as well as the other outdoor wonders afforded by the surrounding vicinity. Over the combined years of our lives, such adventures included hiking, camping, swimming, hunting, shooting, fishing, fort building, dam building, exploring, picnicking, four-wheeling, jeeping, mountain biking, wild-flower picking, searching for lost golf balls, and trail running. I particularly enjoyed shooting bows and guns. While I did some hunting (deer and rabbits), I mostly just enjoyed target shooting into ponds and other areas on my Dad’s land.

Prior to the year 2013, the happiest years of my life were the years I spent between grades one and six in Mesa, Arizona, including the summers in Utah. During these years I resided in a veritable utopian bubble that was unusually immune from

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18 My father was unemployed our first year in Mesa. Thereafter, he was a high school English teacher. With seven kids, there was always a need for some extra side income beyond what he was already receiving from other sources back in Monticello. This pursuit taught my older brothers and I a trade that we continued on our own later in our lives back in Utah.

19 My mother went to summer school at Brigham Young University from 1988-1992 to finish her Bachelor’s degree in elementary education.

20 The year 2013 has been the first year since 1992 that can compare to the happiness and contentment I enjoyed during my utopian years as a child growing up in Arizona and Utah.
significant personal, familial, challenges\textsuperscript{21} as well as from the harsh realities and cares of the real world.

**My Bubble Bursts**

The utopian bubble of my childhood painfully burst at the tail end of my elementary school years, and particularly as I began junior high (7\textsuperscript{th} grade).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig40.jpg}
\caption{My seventh grade student I.D.}
\end{figure}

Such changes were due to forces both internal and external. Internally, I was experiencing the onset of my first extended experiences with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Externally, I had begun junior high school, which proved to be a far less innocent and innocuous environment socially, morally, and otherwise than my sheltered elementary years had been. The dual onset of these two forces formulated a bitter cocktail of unprecedented crucibles. It was as if I, like Adam and Eve, was thrust out of Eden to “till the ground,”\textsuperscript{22} and metaphorically speaking, the onset of OCD was indeed a harrowing experience. The confluence of my burgeoning OCD symptoms and the discovery of life outside the Shangri-La I had so blissfully basked in throughout my

\textsuperscript{21} This is not to say I didn’t face challenges, but the challenges I did face were almost always too minor to cause any sizable emotional or mental stir in my life.

elementary school years was almost more than I could bear. The next twenty years of my life, while interspersed with many blessings, accomplishments, and some marvelous surprises along the way, was largely marked by a psychological-emotional journey to hell and back.

**Back in Monticello as a Teenager**

In 1993, my family moved back to Monticello, Utah, where I attended grades eight through eleven.

![Figure 41. My 10th Grade student I.D. card in Monticello.](image)

While these years were marred significantly by a nearly omnipresent battle with OCD, they were, nonetheless, softened by my family’s return to rural life in Monticello, an atmosphere that was even more innocent and easy to navigate than the suburban dynamics extant in Mesa.

**Academic Lows**

Beginning in eighth grade, I began to struggle academically in an unprecedented fashion. Part of this struggle was a result of laziness and an uncharacteristic lack of academic ambition on my part. Part of it was influenced by my OCD, which I will
describe in detail in the next chapter. My report cards from grades eight through twelve evince my fall from academic grace.

Figure 42. Eighth-grade report card. Notice the ‘C’ and ‘D-grades’ that had begun to show up.

Figure 43. Ninth-grade report card. My second year in algebra one. The ‘C’ and ‘D-grades’ continue.
Figure 44. 10th grade report card. Third year in algebra one. Managed to get as high as an A- in third year. Still scoring C’s and D’s in other classes.

Figure 45. 11th grade report card.

Figure 46. 12th grade report card (first semester).
Youthful Experiences with Hard, Physical Labor

During my early, formative years, I performed a lot of hard, physical, manual labor. My father had built and owned a plot of government subsidized apartments where he regularly employed his sons to do the work involved in tending the grounds and other jobs associated with the upkeep of the apartments. We also had yards at home to tend, and my father continually had new projects for us to help with around our property, or on other properties that he owned and was developing.23 Whether it was weeding, mowing, building, digging, laying concrete, edging, pruning, painting, or collecting trash, there was usually some kind of physical labor that needed to be done. Furthermore, although my Dad had built our home and installed electric heating throughout, he also installed a wood-burning stove, and being a scrupulously frugal man in many regards, he preferred using the wood burning stove to the home’s electric heating apparatus as much as possible. As such, his sons, including me at a very young age, would travel with him up into the nearby Blue Mountains to cut down dead quaking aspen trees and then chainsaw

23 Aside from being a career educator, my father was also a general contractor, and has either built, assembled, or oversaw the development of 58 homes over the course of his life.
them into log chunks to be hauled back home and chopped into firewood. The work was fun in many regards and we boys grew to cherish the pleasant aroma of freshly sawed aspen logs, the cool, clean mountain air, and the familial camaraderie that such strenuous physical labor toward a common cause was apt to engender. Still, it was work—hard work—and inherently dangerous. On one occasion, at about age five, I recall sitting in the front cab of my Dad’s old green ford pickup truck when a sizeable chunk of wood came crashing through the glass window of the truck, narrowly missing the back of my head, the result of an accidental, poorly aimed toss by my brother Joe as he worked to load the truck with freshly cut chunks of quaking aspen. My Dad recorded the incident in his journal:

**Sat. July 6, 1985**

It was hot and the flies were worse that I ever remember, but we got five full pickup loads (filled the trailer) before we came home. Despite the heat, I really enjoyed the day. The boys worked good. Joe broke the back window in the truck, but other than that we had a good day.

When my family moved back to Monticello in 1993, I was the only son left at home; therefore, I became my Dad’s chief helper in cutting, hauling, chopping, and stacking wood for our winter’s supply. Moreover, my primary chore around the house was to build the fire, keep the stove “stoked” with plenty of wood, and remove the buildup of burnt ashes as needed. This was by far my favorite household chore growing up, as I adored pretty much anything that had to do with fire. 
By 1993, I was also primarily responsible for the upkeep of our front and back yards, and did plenty of mowing, weeding, pruning, and my favorite (and specialty)—weed eating.

In 1994, I received my first extended, full-time, paid job as a ranch hand on my uncle Hyrum’s large ranch in Southwestern Utah near the Nevada border. I went to work with a crew headed up, in part, by two of my older brothers. Temperatures routinely hovered at or above 100 degrees out there in the hot, dry, desert sun, and the work was physically strenuous and draining. From painting, weeding, and laying 12-inch pipe to cutting down cedar trees for fence posts and digging post-holes for an 11-strand barbed-wire deer fence, we were kept busy all summer with difficult tasks. My workweeks ranged from 40-55 hours. I made $4.25 per hour, the minimum wage at the time. All 20
or so of us ranch hands lived together in the old Desert Inn ranch house that was rumored to have been once owned decades previously by the Mafia. My brother Dave, with me as his assistant, built cheap bunk beds three bunks high where, with the addition of an inmate style single-bed mattress, we ranch hands slept. Ranch life was filled with difficult, sometimes miserable work, but the company was outstanding because it consisted of my brothers, cousins, and other young men I admired and whose character I viewed to be honorable, and who were, in my estimation, marvelous role models. What an adventure it was! Nevertheless, the experience reinforced for me rather profoundly how much I did not want to pursue a career based in manual labor.

**Adolescent Foray Into Journalism**

In 1996, I saw an advertisement in a local newspaper (the Blue Mountain Panorama) for a position as a news writer.

![Figure 49](#)  
*Figure 49. Cover icon for the Blue Mountain Panorama, the hometown newspaper of Blanding, Utah, which covered news in Blanding and Monticello. This view of the mountain is from the Monticello side. This image is reproduced with the permission of Editors-Owners Neil and Becky Joslin.*

The thought of being paid to do something I loved (writing), and that did not involve hard physical labor and/or sweat was thrilling to me. I applied for the position,
and to my joy, was hired. For the next two years, I covered local high school sports, city council meetings, and other local events as a writer and photographer for *The Blue Mountain Panorama*, the local newspaper for Blanding, Utah, the sister (and rival) city of my hometown of Monticello. During that time, I had approximately 250 articles and/or photographs published. I also wrote for the school newspaper where I eventually became a columnist (*Jordan’s Jargon*). My writing career had begun.

![Image of high school newspaper](image)

*Figure 50. Cover of my high school newspaper and column title.*

**First Failure as a Salesman**

During the summer of 1997, I took a position as a knife salesman as a member of my older brother Paul’s *Vector Marketing* sales office in Spokane, Washington. *Vector*’s product was *Cutco* brand knives. My brother Paul had been extremely successful as both a salesman and manager for *Vector* since 1992. I had greatly admired his success and had even helped him as his assistant one Christmas break when he came home from
college and sold knives to friends and neighbors of my parents. As I neared my
eighteenth birthday, I decided to become an official sales rep and join Paul’s Spokane
team. The plan was to sell knives in my home community in Utah. It did not take me
long to learn just how much I despised product sales, a distaste that has never sweetened
much in the intervening years, nor has my skill at the art improved much, despite
multiple attempts. After six weeks of bereaved dread and growing failure, I gave up
selling Cutco knives, never to return.

High School Athletics

In high school, I was part of the cross-country and track teams, and the basketball
team (8th and 9th grade). As a young athlete, I was initially passionate about basketball,
and spent large portions of my free time playing the sport between grades one and nine.
Nevertheless, I discovered in eighth and ninth grade that my natural proclivities toward
Self-Leadership were better suited for individual sports than team sports. I also liked
individual sports better, and was better at them. This was a vitally important moment of
self-awareness for me. As a result, I quit basketball and focused on cross-country and
track and field my remaining three years of high school. I enjoyed considerable
successes as a runner, winning a state championship in cross-country, five region
championships in cross-country and track, and numerous other state medals or other
awards.
Boy Scouting

Shortly before my senior year in high school, I completed my Eagle Project (the construction of a bench in the Monticello City Park) to finish the requirements for my Eagle Scout award. This was, and continues to be, one of the most important and valued
accomplishments of my life because of the leadership, character, Self-Leadership, and life skills the program instilled in me and helped me to develop and hone.

Figure 54. In Boy Scout Uniform with Eagle Patch and Eagle Card.

**Senior Year in Spokane, Washington**

In the fall of 1997, for athletic,\(^{24}\) psychological,\(^{25}\) and familial\(^{26}\) reasons, I moved to Spokane, Washington where I lived for a year with my oldest brother Paul and his wife Amy.

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\(^{24}\) Having won the individual and team 2A State cross-country championship in 2A (smaller schools) in Utah as a junior, the move to Spokane afforded me an opportunity to compete on one of the best 4A (larger schools) teams in the State of Washington my senior year. Eastern Washington has long been considered one of the more competitive high school cross-country and distance track climates in the United States.
My OCD persisted, and was in some ways exacerbated, during the time I spent in
Spokane, and my struggles with depression got even worse. As a result, I largely spent
my time as a social recluse. I rarely hung out with friends, I failed to purchase a
yearbook, and I did not attend my school’s graduation party. I did compete on the
school’s varsity cross-country and track teams. I graduated from Joel E. Ferris High
School in June 1998 with a modest 2.94 cumulative high school grade-point average
(GPA). I also graduated from “seminary,” after completing four years of religious
instruction as part of the Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day
Saints.

25 This move was viewed as being potentially helpful to my OCD. It turned out to not be so much, and I
struggled with OCD as much, if not more, than I did in Monticello, and met with a professional counselor
more than once while in Spokane.
26 My parent’s relationship was deteriorating rapidly by 1997-1998, my senior year of high school. (They
would eventually split in 2003 and divorce in 2004). The mood of my home was often impacted by this
deterioration and produced an unhappy atmosphere. The move to Spokane with my brother and sister-in-
law provided a more positive, uplifting, and cheerful home life, despite my OCD.
Back to Monticello Again

After high school, I returned home to Monticello for eight months prior to leaving on my LDS mission. That fall, I worked full time for about seven weeks for a local resident on his wheat farm where I drove tractor weeding fields and truck hauling wheat. I also wrote and co-directed an original play with my Mom for fifth and sixth graders at Monticello Elementary School. It was entitled: *Chivalry Isn’t Dead*. The opportunity arose from a federal grant from the Clinton Administration that provided funds for artistic projects in public schools. After six-eight weeks of rehearsal, we held two live performances at the high school. The purpose of the play was twofold. First, we wanted to give the students a hands-on experience with theater. Second, I wanted to *teach* the
boys the importance of being courteous and respectful to girls and women. It was an example of what might well be termed a theatrical Pedagogy of Personal Leadership.

![Figure 57. Advertisement Poster for Chivalry Isn’t Dead.](image)

**Missionary Service in Alberta, Canada**

During the production of these plays, I received a call to serve a two-year mission I had applied for from my Church. In February 1999, I entered the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah. The following month, I traveled to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, my mission’s headquarters. I then served for two years as a full-time missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the cities of Edmonton, Innisfail, Calgary,
and Camrose, Alberta, Canada. A tremendously rewarding experience, it remains, to this day, the single most difficult thing I have done in my life; it is also one of the most rewarding and important.

![My mission plaque was displayed at my local church during my missionary service.](image)

**Figure 58.** My mission plaque was displayed at my local church during my missionary service.

![Camrose, Alberta, Canada Early 2001.](image)

**Figure 59.** Camrose, Alberta, Canada Early 2001.

**College**

In May 2001, I enrolled at Brigham Young University where I took classes for spring and summer terms as a visiting student.27

![First BYU student card.](image)

**Figure 60.** First BYU student card.

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27 I applied to BYU on my mission, but was rejected for poor grades and an average college entrance score (21 on the ACT; I never took the SAT). Nevertheless, BYU had a visiting student program that allowed applicants like me to attend courses there during the less busy spring and summer terms. I took advantage of this opportunity for multiple terms during my college years, transferring all my credits to UVSC, where I eventually earned a Bachelor’s degree in English.
I attended BYU again as a visiting student for the summer of 2002.

Figure 61. Second BYU student card.

That fall, I enrolled full-time at Utah Valley State College (UVSC).\(^{28}\)

Figure 62. Student I.D. at UVSC.

Attending school year-round, I worked hard, and was focused and disciplined in planning and executing my degree requirements. This enabled me to complete 120 academic credit hours (out of 120 required) for a Bachelor’s degree in English (no minor) in a little under 28 months (May 2001 – July 2003).

Work

While attending school full-time, I worked for my older brothers part-time in their business, which involved building shelves in people’s garages and basements as a

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\(^{28}\) UVSC is now Utah Valley University (UVU).
supplementary source of income to their paltry pay as public educators—as my father had done during our Mesa years.

Figure 63. Jensen Brothers’ Shelving flier. I delivered thousands of these to local homes.
Theatre

While at UVSC my first year, I considered majoring in theatre and drama. I took four different courses in the subject (*drama*, *theatre*, *voice & diction*, and *movement for actors*) and acted in the theater department’s production of *The Taming of the Shrew* in 2001 playing the minor role of Curtis, Petruchio’s cook. I had often shown a flair for the dramatic, and had been involved in other plays and productions earlier in my life. As Shakespeare put it, “One man in his time plays many parts” (Shakespeare, 1989, p. 144). Literally, dramatically, vocationally, and obsessive-compulsively, I have surely done so.

*Figure 64. As Santa (Christmas 1998).*

*Figure 65. As Hamlet (Halloween 2002).*
Figure 66. A montage of my dramatic side. Shots of me in green pants and red vest in the bottom right captured my character, Curtis, the cook, from UVSC’s 2001 production of The Taming of the Shrew.

Athletics

My second year of college, I walked on to the cross-country team and earned a spot on the varsity team. Our team finished second at Nationals. In 2003, I earned a half-tuition scholarship on the track team and became an All-American by running on the
second place 4x800 meter relay team at Indoor Nationals. I also competed in the 1,500 meters and 4x800 meter relay team at Outdoor Nationals.

Figure 67. All-American award and medal (the silver one).

Figure 68. Bleeding “Green” as a Wolverine.

Figure 69. Regional and national college medals.

Graduation

In July 2003, I graduated from college (Utah Valley State College; now Utah Valley University) with a Bachelors’ of Science degree in English. It was at the time,
and remains, in my view, one of the most significant achievements of my life. It was also one of the most personally satisfying and rewarding feelings I have ever experienced upon realizing a goal I had set for myself. Part of my self-satisfaction came from realizing the ambitious goal of completing my 4-year degree in just over two years time (27 ½ months). I had made progress academically since high school, and improved my GPA to a cumulative 3.2 in college. I also graduated from the Institute program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which is the college version of the Seminary program for high school students.

Journey to, and Adventures in, the South

The day after finishing my undergraduate course work, I moved to Atlanta, Georgia to fulfill a personal dream. I loved adventure; I loved to travel; and I loved history, especially American Civil War history. The one region of the country I had never visited was the American South. For many years, I had longed to experience life in the American South.
Figure 72. I wrote the word “Atlanta” on a 3x5 card and taping it to the wall of my apartment bedroom my final semester in college. I would color in little sections of it from time-to-time. Doing so served as a motivating reminder of my upcoming adventure to the South, and helped me remain committed to my goal.

Figure 73. On my way to “the ATL.”

Figure 74. I was very proud of my first Georgia driver’s license because it was visible, tangible proof that what was once a dream had now become a reality.

My decision to move to Atlanta was financially precarious, perhaps, in one sense, even foolhardy, as I had no immediate job prospects in Atlanta and the market was in
recession when I graduated in 2003. However, my cousins lived there and offered me a place to stay for an affordable price. I soon got a commission position selling insurance with one of those “rah, rah, rah” marketing companies that in some ways resembled my erstwhile position selling Cutco knives. What was I thinking? After my first day on the job, I came to my senses and quit. I had learned my lesson when it came to sales. Ironically, I still ended up in sales, but of a different variety when I landed a retail job at a FranklinCovey store in Atlanta’s Perimeter Mall. I worked at the FranklinCovey retail stores at the Perimeter and/or Cumberland Malls in Atlanta part time for four months. I quickly learned that I despised retail work almost as much as I had detested direct sales and marketing, albeit for different reasons (I hated being cooped up in a tiny space for hours on end and despised being on my feet constantly as the time passed oh-so-slowly in between customers visits). Despite my less-than-desirable employ, my six months adventure in Georgia was worth its weight in “gold” experientially and educationally; however, I returned to Utah with even less “green” than I had started out with.

**Back to Utah**

Six months later, I moved back to Utah where I did temporary work and got a job as a server at a Mexican restaurant for a short period of time. I also continued building shelves with my older brothers. Near the end of my short stint at the Mexican restaurant, I got a part time job (30 hours per week) as an assistant to the director of The Center for the Advancement of Leadership at my collegiate Alma Mater.
I also got involved part-time with a network marketing company (*Pre-Paid Legal*) and secured part-time employment as a sportswriter for the *Daily Herald*, the local newspaper of Provo, Utah, where I worked as a correspondent covering local high school and college sports. During my time there, approximately 50-60 of my articles were published.

It was around this same time that I began a new career as a youth motivational speaker and author, and began teaching seminars and/or speaking to high school and college students. In 2005, I incorporated, naming my business *Freedom Focus LLC*. I also published my first book, targeting an adolescent and young adult audience.
Return to Atlanta

At the end of 2005, I moved back to Atlanta where I lived for three-and-a-half more years attempting to build my business. I also substitute taught school on a part-time basis in Cobb County School District. In October 2007, I secured work as a professional contract trainer/seminar facilitator. In 2006, I met my wife, Lina, a student at The Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech). We were married in 2008. Lina graduated with her degree in mechanical engineering from Georgia Tech in 2009.
Move to Texas

Immediately following Lina’s graduation, we moved to Houston, Texas, where Lina’s new job was located. In June 2009, I began my doctoral program at Fielding.

During the 2009-2010 school year, I taught ninth grade English full-time at Cypress-Ridge High School in Houston.
Move to Newfoundland, Canada

In June 2010, we moved to St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada with my wife’s work.

![Figure 82](image.jpg)

*Figure 82.* My social insurance card, Canada’s analogue to a social security card in the U.S., used for health care purposes.

My time in St. John’s afforded me a two-year sabbatical where I could focus on completing my doctoral course work and begin writing my dissertation. I also taught 70 all-day seminars throughout Canada as a part-time contract trainer during this period of time.

Back to Houston

In April 2012, we returned to Houston, Texas, where we currently live. I spent the past year finishing my doctoral course work and dissertation writing. I also taught 51 more seminars as a contract trainer and self-published my second book, a poetry collection entitled *Psalms of Life.*
In March 2013, I graduated with my Doctorate in Education, we moved into our first new home, and Lina gave birth to our first child: Tucker Joseph Jensen, a boy.
Life Summary

I am now 33 years old. I have moved 41 times so far in my life. These moves have taken me to 38 different addresses in five States and two Provinces of Canada spanning five different time zones (Pacific, Mountain, Central, Eastern, and Newfoundland). I have attended ten different schools (elementary, jr. high, high school, college, university, and graduate school). I have had 37 different positions of employment\(^{29}\) spanning a dozen different industries (i.e., education, professional training, journalism, sales & marketing, software packaging, construction, leadership, grounds keeping, food service, temporary work, assembly, and entertainment). Five of these positions were entrepreneurial-based; 31 were wage-earning positions, all of which added texture and richness to my overall education and life experiences as I strove to pursue my ultimate goals to teach, speak, and write. While I am still not a financially independent speaker and writer, I have, to date, addressed approximately 15,000 people in over 400 audiences\(^{30}\) in 46 different States and Provinces (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) on more than a score of topics.

To date, my life has been a tale of triumph and trial, sorrow and success, anticipation, achievement, and even ecstasy mixed together with a full measure of anxiety, failure, and agony. Born into a large, loving family, I consider my life to have ultimately been richly favored. While not marked much by financial abundance, I consider myself rich in relationships, memories, experiences, education, and an intrapersonal will to self-lead. While the difficulties of obsessive-compulsive disorder and other life challenges have tested me to my core, as subsequent vignettes will reveal,

\(^{29}\) Many of which were temporary work assignments.

\(^{30}\) Over 300 of these addresses were paid, professional engagements.
the bulwark of these riches have provided an indomitable defense that has, working in concert with my will to self-lead, ultimately held strong. This concludes the biographical introduction to my life.

**My Evolving Journey as an Autoethnographer**

My pathway as an autoethnographer is commensurate with my ongoing journey as a journaler, which began early in my life. My first recorded journal entry came on January 1, 1987 when I was seven years old. My inspiration to start journaling was largely a result of my father and older brother’s journal keeping habits. My brother Joe was eight years older than me and we shared a room together. I was in first grade; he was in ninth grade. I all but worshipped my older brothers, so neophyte writer though I was at the time, it was reasonable—and not surprising—that I would desire to put my new found skills to work in aping a practice I had observed my heroes engaging in. My fledgling capacities at composition are evident in this inaugural entry. Nevertheless, Joe and I had twin desks in our room where we would sometimes read and study together, and with a lot of help from Joe, my spelling saw a marked improvement in subsequent entries.
Dad’s Journals

My immediate family members were all active in the LDS Church, whose religious culture advocates journal writing and record keeping generally speaking. While my brothers and I were certainly influenced by this fact, we were probably inspired even
more by the prolific example of my father’s journaling habits. Having begun a personal journal of his own in 1961, as a junior in high school, he has continued to pen a daily record of events, thoughts, feelings, et cetera, with varying degrees of consistency up to the present day. He was particularly conscientious about the practice from 1961 up until the mid-late 1980s. He even had his journals bound and printed in matching red covers with gold lettering—with his name and the year—adorning the spine of each volume. These dozen or so 8”x11” volumes contained nearly two decades worth of journal writing and made an attractive addition to his office library along with his binders-full of Franklin Day Planner™ pages where he tended to record his journal after he began using the planning system in 1983. A lover of books and written material from before I could even read, it was natural that I would find myself in his office library perusing his shelves for tomes that piqued my interest—whether I understood them or not.³¹ It was in his office that he also kept his copious journals. I was enamored at such a voluminous effort to record one’s own life journey, and petitioned his permission to begin reading from them—a practice I have continued from time-to-time throughout my life. Doing so allowed me to journey into the past where I came to know my father on a level that would have been impossible without his journals. I found reading about his outdoor adventures in rural Southeastern Utah engrossing. Such activities included jeeping, hiking, camping,

³¹ My mimicry of my brothers included an ardent desire to read and/or “study” what they were studying. Since my four brothers ranged from eight-to-ten years older than me, this posed more than a minor education gap. This fact did not concern me, and I spent many hours while still in elementary school “pretending” to do the same course work they were engaged in as high school and college students. Ironically—since I would never end up enrolling in the actual courses in high school or college—calculus, physics, and chemistry were among my favorite subjects to “pretend” to do, and copying down advanced equations and problems induced no small amount of youthful glee in my mind and heart. I also took a liking to English at that stage in my life, and at one point at age 10 or 11, read Shakespeare’s entire play The Merchant of Venice. I don’t think I understood a single line of it, but completing the task filled me a tremendous sense of accomplishment, and built my youthful confidence that I could stick with a tedious task and see it through to completion.
rabbit and deer hunting, skiing, et cetera, in a place and time when laws and social mores surrounding outdoor adventures resembled the *wild, wild West* a lot more than they do today. His journals empowered me to see my Dad in a different light than would have been possible without them. I came to see how human and real his experiences, thoughts, and feelings were as a young man, and was able to identify things I had in common with him I would have otherwise been unaware of. I began to see my Dad more as a friend. Moreover, I came to have a greater sense of respect for my father and friend as I came to discover all he had accomplished in his life by age 36 (when I was born). Furthermore, I came to better understand my own life as chronicled by my father at a time that preceded even my earliest memories. For example, imagine the thoughts and feelings engendered in a son’s mind and heart to read a journal entry like this:

**Tuesday, August 21, 1979**

Took my sweetheart to the hospital this morning and by early afternoon she had delivered a beautiful little boy. We have decided to name him Jordan Rex. It was pretty special. I was impressed at how hard she had to work. Dr. Smith was really cute about letting me in, and telling me about it all the way through. Sure like Dr. Smith.

Or consider the laughs generated by an entry like this:

**Sat. June 20, 1981**

Tonight the boys decided that they wanted to take me to dinner for Father’s Day. We ended up at the Elk Ridge Restaurant in Blanding. It was a royal rip-off. They wanted 70 cents for a small soft drink. The place was packed with smokers and the whole experience was not something I would want to repeat.

Most memorable thing about the whole trip was Jordan eating everyone’s raw onions. He got started and just ate one after another, to all the other kid’s amazement and glee. When he was all done with the onions we gave him some tomato which he spit out with disdain. And so it goes.
Or imagine how I must have grinned when reading of my life as a toddler, and my parent’s fears of portent:

**Wed. January 27, 1982**

Pauline came to visit with Jordan after school. Jordan had fallen off the bar today while assisting in the breadmaking and had a shiner on his left eye. That kid is a Linous, if there ever was one. Everywhere he goes lately he has his blanket slung over his shoulder and his finger in his mouth. He is also capable of more mischief and is far more bull-headed than any of the other Jensen’s. Hope that does not portend of things to come.

Finally, imagine the pathos and empathy that swept through my heart as I read the following:

**Tues. January 24, 1984**

Felt worse than usual tonight and went to bed as soon as I finished storytime with Jordan and Jessie. Sometimes I look at those sweet little kids and wonder where I am going to get the strength to get them raised. Lately, the magnitude of what lies ahead for me in rearing these seven children and keeping my wife happy has all but overwhelmed me.

With experiences like this reading my Dad’s journal, as well as my observations of his and my brother’s example of journal writing, it is no wonder that my days as an autoethnographer began at a tender age.

**Later Journals and Scrapbooking**

I have continued journaling up to the present day. While my consistency ebbed and flowed between 1987 and 2001, I still managed to pen probably 2,000 or so pages in my journal, personal letters, and/or day planner over the course of that time period. Beginning in 2001, as a freshman in college, I began journaling with greater consistency,
coverage, and detail. Since August of that year, I missed very few days and/or weeks up until 2012. More recently, I have stopped typing daily entries in place of writing weekly, monthly, and/or period summaries where I focus on highlights (i.e., events, thoughts, feelings, spiritual experiences, goals, dreams, personal insights, opinions, and lessons learned) rather than recording daily accounts of routine tasks and responsibilities. Because of the potential value journaling holds for me and my posterity (as I discovered from reading my Dad’s journals), I doubt I will stop journaling until the day I die. I will also likely persist in the habit because I feel a very real existential pull to record my life’s journey. Whenever I do neglect my journal writing, this pull nags at me, and does not let me rest until I “catch up.” Of course, journals do not stay “current” for very long, and therefore the Self-Leadership directed habit of journaling has become deeply engrained in who I am, and has helped me to develop Self-Leadership oriented traits such as diligence, discipline, consistency, and focus. I have also forayed somewhat into the realms of scrapbooking, although my intentions in doing so have focused much more on efficiency in documentation than on cosmetic appeal or impressiveness.

**Emerson Journals**

One of my literary and philosophical mentors is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was an avid journaler. I once read that Emerson penned some 187 journals over the course of his life. Such prolific diary keeping impressed me, especially when considering his journals often included iterations of his philosophical musings, poetic efforts, and other

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32 Due to the myriad journals I’ve kept in different locations over the years, I do not have a precise quantification of journal pages composed to date. However, I would estimate it at somewhere around 7,000 pages including day planner pages and letters.
information unrelated to a typical record of events one would normally expect to see in a mere diary.

In 2003, my father and I visited his home (now a museum and tourist attraction) in Concord, Massachusetts. I felt honored to walk through his nineteenth century abode, restored with integrity to the house’s original arrangements. My spirit felt reverent as I viewed and touched his black, scholars’ graduation robe from Harvard hung up in his closet. I marveled at his capacious yet cozy library and the rows and rows of original volumes still resting on the shelves well over a century after being originally placed thereon by this American literary and philosophical master.

Figure 87. Standing in front of Emerson’s home in Concord, MA; August 2003.
Somewhere in the vicinity of this time period, I began a new journal of my own, separate from my main journal, or daily journal. Rather than focus on a record of daily events, thoughts, and emotions, the new journal would chronicle my own lines of thought on subjects such as philosophy, theology and religion, and Self-Leadership. I would keep my “Emerson Journals” in two different mediums. First, I began carrying around what I refer to as my “little black book,” which consisted of a 4.5 x 3.25 inch, 160 page lined

33 Not to be confused with a book of contact information of former girlfriends, as was parodied in the 2004 Hollywood film of the same name.
paper notebook with a black and white marble colored cover. Later, I started a typed
version on my computer. Sometimes, I would take the time to transcribe my written
notes into my computer. Between 2002-2006, my mind was particularly flooded with
thoughts, ideas, and inspiration, and my Emerson Journals exploded to fill 22 of these
“little black books.” Whenever I experienced a meaningful thought, or inspiration-filled
mental sequence, I strove to pen it in my Emerson Journal. I was amazed at how
common and voluminous such thoughts became once I had made a serious commitment
to the discipline of recording them. Sometimes a thought would arrive late at night after I
had already retired for bed, and I would feel compelled to get myself out of bed, turn on
the light, grab a pen, and jot the information down. Other times inspiration would hit me
while I was driving, and I’d likewise feel compelled to pull my car to the side of the road,
extract my Little Black Book and pen from my pocket, and properly record whatever
epiphany I had received before continuing my drive. I began carrying my pen and
notebook around with me religiously, not knowing when the next gem of thought would
enter my brain. Since 2006, spontaneous inspiration for my Emerson Journals has ebbed
precipitously; however, I often still carry my Little Black Book and a pen, and I still save
a new document each year on my computer whereby I record thoughts, ideas, self-quotes,
inspiration, personal revelation, and other information in my Emerson Journals.

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34 Looks like a miniature version of Mead brand’s Marble Memo notebooks and can be purchased for about
a dollar at most major retailers that carry school supplies.
35 Not yet a smart phone user, I also use my Emerson Journals as a convenient way to keep track of basic
information such as addresses, phone numbers, internet URL’s, and other key, practical information the old
fashioned way.
Toward Autoethnographic Chronicling

My many experiences journaling have uniquely prepared me for the art of autoethnographic chronicling. Aside from my prolific practice as a journal writer, I also have the concomitant experiences of reflection that inevitably attends such efforts at self-recording. And by valuing self-honesty and integrity, I believe I have developed the skill of analyzing my own autobiography with a respectable semblance of objectivity. Perhaps I am giving myself too much credit, but no one can dispute my beliefs, and on this point, I do hold out that while I am certainly not void of bias and narcissism, I do think I can look at constituent parts of my individual life story and evaluate it without getting unduly subjective. Reviewers of this document, will, of course, make up their own minds on this point, and may choose to judge me more critically than I judge myself. Readers of this document will, however, also come to discover that I am not exactly an easy judge of myself. Nevertheless, I hold that an essential component of Self-Leadership Efficacy involves developing the capacity to reflect on and analyze one’s own self-journey with sufficient objectivity to engender honest and accurate self-awareness and knowledge of things as they really are independent of others input, viewpoints, or diagnoses. This is not to say that others’ feedback is not important and potentially valuable (it is, of course, essential since no one views themselves entirely objectively), it is merely to underscore the importance of developing the essential Self-Leadership skill of becoming increasingly able to provide accurate, objective, intrapersonal self-feedback to oneself.

There are many other ways in which my life experiences have enlarged my capacity for autoethnographic inquiry, accurate self-awareness, and honest self-evaluation. They include multiplying life experiences, writing my first book wherein I
published my first autoethnographic vignettes\textsuperscript{36} (Jensen, 2005), becoming a doctoral student, et cetera. I now address these points.

**Multiplying Life Experiences**

In the past 13 years, my range of travels, experiences and opportunities, and overall education and skills have expanded significantly. As these life experiences have multiplied, the amount of autoethnographic data available for analysis has similarly increased. Some of these experiences have been particularly well suited to my development as a journaler and autoethnographer. This section highlights three such events/experiences.

**I Am Sovereign.**

In 2005, I published a book on personal leadership for teenagers and developed a seminar on the same material. The purpose of the book and seminar was to teach young people what personal or Self-Leadership is, and why becoming an effective self-leader is both important and valuable. At this point in time, I was yet unfamiliar with the term, *Autoethnography*, but had already begun to recognize the pedagogical potential of utilizing anecdotes from my personal history to supplement educational material I was developing on the subject of personal leadership. In my book and seminar, for example, I drew on several experiences from my own life in an attempt to illuminate the potential import and value of the principles I was espousing and promoting. My goal was to evoke emotions in my readers and hearers that would teach, motivate, inspire, and/or influence them to *want* to become better self-leaders themselves. As I worked with students in my adolescent and young adult seminars, it became increasingly evident that my use of

\textsuperscript{36} Although at the time, I did not know them by the term, *autoethnographic vignettes*. 
personal stories was enhancing (bringing to life) the material I was sharing. I observed that sharing relevant stories from my own experiences, emotions, and thought processes aided in grabbing and holding their attention while I delivered the material. It also seemed to empower me as a speaker and author with a sincerity and authenticity that the students respected and appreciated. Through the process, I became ever more convinced of the potential of autoethnographic vignettes to powerfully complement any principle-based material. Moreover, it demonstrated to my listeners and readers that, while I was not perfect, I did strive to practice what I preached, which tended to instill in them a greater sense of trust in my message and me.

Doctoral journey.

In 2009, I became a doctoral student at Fielding Graduate University. I spent the first 13 months of my program wondering how in the world I was going to construct my dissertation. All I knew for sure was that I wanted to focus on Self-Leadership and wanted to contribute something that would further promote its efficacious practice by self-leaders everywhere. I faced a measure of discouragement that first year as I contemplated the seemingly small window of opportunity that existed in the academe to communicate what was really in my heart to share about Self-Leadership. It seemed there were all these voices (real or perceived) that kept saying: “No Jordan, you can’t do that here in the academe; it’s not academic enough.”

Meeting Rodney.

That all changed in July 2010 when I met Dr. Rodney Beaulieu at Fielding Graduate University’s national session in Tucson, Arizona. At the time, I was still unsure
of how I would navigate the dissertation process and construct my outline. Then in the process of just trying to get to know other professors as I made plans for completing course work, Rodney’s name came up, and I decided to approach him and solicit an opportunity to sit down and chat. A cheerful, generous, and congenial scholar, he courteously acquiesced. That evening, we spent about 45 minutes discussing my dissertation interests. In the course of our conversation, Rodney mentioned a term that was entirely new to me: *Autoethnography*.

Rodney explicated *Autoethnography* as a relatively new qualitative research method that was typically utilized by students with diverse backgrounds who had experienced the constraints of structural inequality or other life hardships. When he said that, I thought about my experiences with OCD, my habit of journaling, and my interest in Self-Leadership. Maybe, I thought, there could be a good fit here. Our conversation ended, but I contacted Rodney again after National Session had ended because I wanted to know more about this fascinating new concept. Rodney was a little surprised at my interest initially, and he admitted to wondering: “What’s this upper-middle class white kid have to complain about?” I still smile when I think about his understandably natural reaction. When I explained my past history with OCD, a light bulb clicked on in his own brain, and our educational journey together began.

**Poetry as an Autoethnographic Tool**

Friedrich (1996) has written about the ways in which poetry and culture can inform each other by “illustrat[ing] … decisive connections” (p. 37) between the two, thereby drawing attention to another literary medium through which anthropology (and by extension, ethnography and Autoethnography) can be explored.
Students of culture, like poets, are engaged in constructing a worldview… [where] the objective is not only to get a worldview but to get inside a worldview, to construct texts of one’s own that reveal maximum empathy and comprehension…. Poems or songs … can constitute an incredibly swift and sensitive entryway [to that worldview]…. These insights and intuitions are of singular value because they characteristically deal with and involve the emotions, the cultural experience as felt as well as understood—that is, in psychological terms, the phenomena of intention, identification, motivation, and affect that are often neglected in cultural analysis—including much of the recent research that combines an ideology of emotionality with practices that feature analytical instruments and objectivized data. (Friedrich, 1996, p. 38-39)

Marable (1983) also lauds the qualitative advantages of the medium by suggesting that poetry can accomplish qualitatively what “tedious (quantitative) research” (p. ix)—however essential and meaningful it may be—simply cannot. Says he: “Probably the greatest intuitive insights I achieved came from those writers who are most removed from social sciences—the poets” (p. ix). He then reproduces a quatrain from a Langston Hughes poem that he asserts, “says more than I could ever present in the form of quantitative data” (p. ix). Like Marable, I have likewise drawn great “intuitive insights” and wisdom from the poets, and have further developed these insights through attempts to become a poet myself.

My personal passion for poetry began in elementary school. My fifth grade teacher included poetry (its study and memorization) as part of our language arts curriculum. To this day I can still remember Longfellow’s Paul’s Revere’s Ride, Thayer’s Casey at the Bat, and Guest’s Somebody Said it Couldn’t Be Done. Then in sixth grade, my teacher assigned us poetry compilations wherein we copied our favorite poems and also included original pieces we had penned ourselves. I threw myself into the project with unusual vigor, copying down 30 poems and adding 10 more of my own

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38 Ernest Lawrence Thayer, American poet (1863-1940).
creation. Some inclusions in the anthology portion, such as Babcock’s⁴⁰ Be Strong, Field’s⁴¹ Wynken, Blynken, and Nod, and Hughes’⁴² Dreams, have remained favorites of mine all these years later, and I have memorized all of them either partially or entirely.

Three of the 30 poems I included were from Shakespeare; although I could not even understand most passages of such advanced verse, it was a clear indication of an early, budding fondness for the matchless works of the Immortal Bard.⁴³

As for my own early verse, it was predictably mostly doggerel, albeit perhaps with a tinge of promise, or so I’d like to think! However, one piece in particular, entitled Poetry, reveals not only my growing passion for all things prosodic, but my already well-established conception of its universality as a characterizing medium:

Poetry⁴⁴

Poetry is a pencil in hand,  
Poetry is very grand,  
Poetry is a soft sweet song,  
Poetry is about right and wrong,  
Poetry is the adjective big and small,  
Along with happy, exited (sic), hungry, sad and tall,  
Poetry is from the heart,  
Poetry is thinking smart,  
Poetry is food and money,  
Poetry can be very funny,  
Poetry is clothes and cars,  
Poetry can travel very far,  
Poetry is people,  
Poetry is Everything,  
Poetry is You.⁴⁵

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⁴⁰ Maltbie Davenport Babcock, American clergyman and poet (1858-1901).
⁴¹ Eugene Field, American poet (1850-1895).
⁴² Langston Hughes, American poet (1902-1967).
⁴³ My Christmas gift from my dad in 1989 (age 10, fourth grade) was the Complete Works of Shakespeare, and I had become acquainted with Shakespeare even earlier through many enamored perusals of my Dad and Grandmother Smith’s libraries, which were both flush with Shakespearean volumes I felt an easy and natural literary attraction to.
⁴⁴ All originally authored poem titles and/or journal entries throughout this dissertation will be underlined to differentiate them from section headings.
In ninth grade, my English teacher assigned us all to memorize Frost’s[^46] *The Road Not Taken*. To this day, I can still recite the poem from that assignment in school—again one of the most (if not the most) memorable learning experiences of an entire class, if not an entire grade. Such readily recallable knowledge comes in handy as a public speaker, and especially so back in 2010-11 when I taught the same poem to my own ninth grade English classes at Cypress Ridge High School in Houston, Texas.

One day when I was perhaps eleven or twelve, I came across a book in my father’s office library during one of my many perusals of his book collection. The book was an edition (1958/1997) of Cook’s *One Hundred and One Famous Poems*. This was a seminal moment in my life’s poetical journey. Cook’s anthology was the most important and memorable book I ever “checked-out” of Dad’s Library. Several of the poems immediately resonated with my growing ardor for all things metrical, and my passion for the anthology would only grow in coming years. Later in 2001, as a freshman in college, I received a birthday card and a $20 bill from my Grandma Jensen (paternal). With this fresh “lettuce” in my poor, empty, college wallet, I paid a visit to a local University bookstore where I purchased my own copy of Cook’s anthology, and continued to read. As I type these very words, my cherished copy of Cook’s inspired analects rests but a few inches away from my ready grasp.

[^45]: Jensen (2012, p. 27). Reprinted with the permission of the copyright owner—me. All further poems in this dissertation that are reprinted from *Psalms of Life* (Jensen, 2012) have likewise been permissibly reproduced.

[^46]: Robert Frost; American poet (1874-1963).
My introduction to this valuable volume also jump-started my inclination to memorize poems I found philosophically meaningful, theologically illuminating, historically narrated, or just simply aurally and/or rhythmically pleasant. Such a practice was, no doubt, influenced and bolstered by the religious exercise of memorizing scriptures, something that Mormon children are introduced to before age five. Being enrolled in a Seminary of Religion class all four years of high school provided me the opportunity to memorize up to 100 scriptures for classroom credit, and I did memorize most of them. This practice was undoubtedly helpful in sharpening a skill that easily transferred to the memorization of other things like quotes, aphorisms, maxims, proverbs, stories, and of course, poems.

As the years go by, my love of poetry continues to grow. Moreover, I am perpetually impressed by the power poetry holds to inform my exercise of Self-Leadership. I discovered in Cook’s anthology that many poets have composed on Self-Leadership oriented topics; for example: Longfellow (p. 1, 123), Sill (p. 2), Wordsworth (p. 27), Babcock (p. 37), Cooke (p. 44), Ingalls (p. 75), Burroughs (p. 76), Henley (p. 95), Kipling (p. 108), Cary (p. 111), Holland (p. 127), Shakespeare (130), Stanton (p. 135), and Doane (p. 136). Other poets, less famous and august—albeit no less enthusiastic—have written Self-Leadership oriented verse extensively (e.g., Jensen, 2012 & Neck, 1996).

In light of these experiences, it will come as no surprise to the reader that I choose to utilize poetry—my own and that of others—in forthcoming vignettes to complement my story. Gioia (2004) wrote that, “one purpose of poetry is to give us words to articulate our joys and sorrows without revealing them” (p. 33-34). While the purpose of

\[47\] All authors and poems cited from Cook (1958/1997).
the autoethnographic data in this dissertation is in fact to reveal both my sorrows and joys, weaknesses and strengths, failures and successes, it is my hope that the use of poetry in telling my story will aid readers in better comprehending the emotional pathos I experienced along the way by virtue of whatever visceral illumination might be ignited by these non-prosaic addendums.

Earlier, I explained that while my Autoethnography primarily follows the tenets of analysis rather than evocation, the sharing of my story itself does contain evocative elements. My use of poetry is an example of this secondary use of evocative Autoethnography to strengthen its primarily analytic components. It might also be a way to better bridge the gap that currently separates autoethnographers of different persuasions. This may please evocative autoethnographers Ellis and Bochner, who desire to see a greater unity in the field. In the words of Bochner, “I’m in favor of a feeling of cohesion among ethnographers” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 444), to which Ellis replied, “I agree” (p. 444).

The Relativity of Suffering

In the autoethnographic vignettes that follow, much will be said about my own personal suffering. As a reader, there may be times when—from the vantage point of your own life’s unique set of paradigms and beliefs, challenges and obstacles, and collected experiences—you may find yourself, for one reason or another, feeling judgmental toward the experiences I share, the language I have chosen to describe them, and the supposed degree of difficulty (from your perspective) those challenges posed in my life. For instance, when reading about some of my experiences, you may find yourself thinking “Wow! This guy is really amazing for all he has suffered through and
accomplished.” On the other hand, you might think something more along the lines of, “What is this guy crying about? At least he had a family that loved him, food on his table, and opportunities to receive a quality education. At least he grew up in a free country that granted him his civil rights, and at least he didn’t have to deal with abuse, neglect, hunger, racial prejudice or disenfranchisement.”

I am the first to admit I have been richly blessed in my life. If you merely look at my present and past life from outside of my mind and heart, it is true that the eye will detect many privileges and opportunities. However, as a beloved hymn eloquently points out: “In the quiet heart is hidden Sorrow that the eye can’t see,” and thus have my struggles been. No one in the world escapes adversity, yet no two people on Planet Earth face the exact same combination of obstacles and difficulties. Recognizing this, it is a truism that no person can truly “understand” perfectly the extent or degree of another person’s suffering. Even individuals who have faced what looks on the surface like the same kind of trial, I submit that it does not take a very high level of critical thinking to determine that separate person’s experiences are still markedly individual, and are therefore unique from any other person’s experiences—no matter how similar they may appear. For this reason, it becomes technically inaccurate and dishonest for anyone to ever say to someone else “I understand what you are going through” with categorical certainty. Of course, this statement is socially acceptable to use as an approximating phrase of empathy for those who have experienced similar situations or circumstances to us. However, it would technically be more accurate to say: “I feel like I can relate,” rather than, “I understand.”

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Frankl (2006) has commented on the fundamental relativity of suffering as it relates to the actual experience of different kinds of suffering in disparate individuals.

A man’s suffering is similar to the behavior of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the “size” of human suffering is absolutely relative. (p. 44)

The meaning of this quote is enriched when one considers that Frankl spoke these words in relation to his own experiences in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. When comparing different degrees and kinds of apples-to-oranges human suffering, most would likely agree it is hard to come up with many explicit example of real human suffering that are widely considered to be worse than what imprisoned Jews and others suffered at the hands of the Nazis. Yet Frankl affirms: “It is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although human suffering is omnipresent” (p. 44).

Therefore, as you—the reader—review the material to come, I invite you to do so with a suspension of any natural inclinations you may have to judge my story through the lens of your own life experiences with suffering, which you have most certainly had to deal with in context of your own unique life. Nevertheless, your life experiences with suffering are yours, and mine are mine. Keeping the two separated in your own mind as you read my story may go a long ways in opening yourself up to the possibility of learning something that might productively inform your own singular life’s journey. True integrity in reading would demand I extend the same courtesy to you were I reading your story.
Reading what someone has written is a lot like listening to what someone says.

Peck (1997) explains that listening—really listening—“is an active exercise of our attention and, by necessity, is hard work” (p. 50). He elaborates by saying:

Listening well also requires total concentration upon another and is a manifestation of love in the broadest sense of the word. An essential part of listening well is the discipline of bracketing, [which involves] the temporary giving up or setting aside of your own prejudices, frames of reference, and desires in order to experience as far as possible another’s world from the inside, stepping inside his or her shoes. This unification of speaker [or writer] and listener [or reader] is actually an extension and enlargement of ourselves, and new knowledge is always gained from it. Moreover, since listening [or reading] well involves bracketing, it also involves a temporary total acceptance of the other [or writer].” (p. 50-51)

Few, if any, persons wish to be or be viewed as being a prejudiced person, and I certainly do not wish to label any potential readers as such; nevertheless, the fact remains that all of us—as imperfect human beings—pre-judge certain persons and situations and circumstances from time to time. Those pre-judgments may have nothing to do with something like race, which is often the topic that comes to mind first when using a word like prejudiced. Race is just one way we can potentially pre-judge a person, but there are countless other ways (e.g. age, experience, education, preferences and tastes, hobbies, religious and/or other beliefs and paradigms, opinions, where you live, where you were born, who your friends are, and the list goes on). While I do not consider myself to be a prejudiced person, I am human, and confess to being guilty of pre-judging persons and situations on a regular basis, a fact that ever proves my own human imperfection and lack of omniscience. As such, I am empathetic to others who struggle as well. Nevertheless, as the author of this treatise, I invite you to afford me the respect and courtesy of doing your best to suspend any pre-inclined judgments you may have toward me and/or my story as you either casually peruse or carefully examine (whatever the case may be) the
vignettes that follow. As inherently difficult as it may be, I would expect no less of myself were our roles to be transposed.
CHAPTER FIVE

Vignette One: OCD is Hell

Introduction to Vignette One

In church, I grew up singing the hymn Lord, I Would Follow Thee by Susan Evans McCloud. In the hymn is an eloquent and memorable poetic quatrain:

Who am I to judge another
When I walk imperfectly?
In the quiet heart is hidden
Sorrow that the eye can’t see.49

Such was my mental affliction with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Much, indeed most, of the suffering and sorrow I’ve born, and continue to bear, exists beyond the sight of other mortals, even those nearest and dearest to me. My collective experiences with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) remind me of the title of a popular book written about one woman’s battle with manic depression (see Jamison, 1996). It is called: An Unquiet Mind. While her story deals with depression rather than OCD, I’ve always considered this titular exposition an apt and eloquent description of the hellish mental turmoil I have beleaguered through with OCD. I would add the adjectives “racing” and “neurotic” to further reveal its diseased properties according to my own horrific intimacy with its horrors. My experience with racing thoughts was explicitly pointed out to me one day in psychotherapy, as I recorded in my journal.

Thursday, October 11, 2001

I ha[d] a psychological evaluation done today. Met w/ a fellow named ——— who got a background idea of my struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. I took a personality test as part of it, which was 240 questions long.

49 Hymn #220, Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (1985, p. #220).
I then met w/ my therapist … for the second time. Was productive insofar as she helped me identify one of the symptoms of which I had not though of much before. That is a mind which has thoughts which race and race. She pointed out how my very way of presenting info to her comes out quickly, and jumps from here to there. Anyway, it was very eye-opening to have that point elucidated to me, for I have never thought about or realized this in specific terms as a concrete issue in the matter.

Due to the intensity (in terms of both speed and colorfulness) of my brain’s obsessive patterns over the course of the past 21 years, I could, with relative ease, write hundreds of pages of vignettes detailing the minutia of its malevolent menace in my life. To avoid overdoing it while still providing a lucidly illustrative and varied account of my experiences with OCD, I have chosen to produce a collection of sub-vignettes contained herein as separate sections of this umbrella vignette. These sub-vignettes provide a mostly chronological chronicling of my experiences with OCD, which, over the years, have evolved by degree and kind, and especially by kind. In other words, a primary pattern that has arisen over time is the gradual evolution of one “strain” of obsessive thinking into another, different “strain.” This has been particularly discouraging in that as I have transcended, learned to manage, or even outgrown one strain or pattern of OCD-related thoughts, another, different strain has usually taken its place, thereby dampening hopes of conquering the disorder entirely, and leaving me to suffer continually from various thought-symptoms of one kind or another, up to and including the moment I write these words.

In sharing the following experiences with OCD, I do not wish to elicit pity from readers. Sympathy? Yes; but pity? No. To the contrary, these vignettes have a targeted purpose for which “pity parties” are considered uninvited intruders. My purpose is first to educate readers about OCD. Then, I share my story to heighten reader’s awareness of,
and interest in, the various problems surrounding OCD and mental illness in general. Finally, I seek to share how I have come to manage (not to be confused with overcome) OCD to an extent that I am able to lead a life that is normal, productive, fulfilling, and, I would argue, even successful, in hopes that others might benefit in similar ways in their own struggles (however minor or severe) with mental hygiene, which Peck (1978, 1997) asserts is all of us to varying degrees.

Some may wonder why I feel comfortable disclosing such detail about my experiences with such an intimate psychological dragon. In a world where plenty of stigmas still surround mental illness in general, I sometimes question it myself. Moreover, I sometimes worry and wonder about the potential for negative fallout from my decision to disclose such details. Could such disclosure inhibit certain opportunities that might otherwise come my way were I to remain silent? How might others judge me, label me, or think me a fool to self-disclose so openly and honestly a part of my life that countless people over countless generations have so eagerly and diligently locked away in the closet as best they could?

Such concerns notwithstanding, it is my conviction that sharing my story carries the potential to positively influence not only contemporary discussions about OCD, Self-Leadership, and Autoethnography, but also holds the potential to influence actual individuals who struggle daily with OCD, depression, or other forms of mental illness. According to Hinshaw (2007), we still face an “uphill … battle,” (p. 241) in terms of eroding negative stigmas surrounding mental illness. Nevertheless, I, like Hinshaw, am encouraged “by those eras in history when bravery trumped ignorance and compassionate views of mental illness emerged” (p. 242) as well as by “the great progress in science and
clinical practice of recent decades and the potential for humans to overcome their proclivities to categorize and stereotype, by empathizing and providing justice” (p. 242). Most saliently, I am also encouraged by the perpetual inner freedom we each possess as self-leaders to exercise principles and strategies of Self-Leadership to improve our inner and outer worlds, and am likewise empowered by the paradigm that despite the challenges that OCD presents to me in my life, I am not ultimately a victim of the disorder.

It bears noting that I am not the first to self-disclose my battle with OCD. Others have gone before me. Two examples—one popular (Bennett, 2010), and one scholarly (Brooks, 2011)—have recently written a book and article, respectively, about their own battle with OCD. Like myself, Brooks (2011) also utilizes an autoethnographic approach in disclosing her narrative; I am, therefore, not the first to do so. Moreover, many high profile historical and contemporary individuals have either admitted to, or are believed to suffer/have suffered from OCD in their life. These individuals represent a wide range of industries including art (Michelangelo), military (Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson), science (Albert Einstein), music (Ludwig Van Beethoven), business (Donald Trump), athletics (David Beckham), and entertainment (Penélope Cruz) (see Disabledworld.com, 2008).^50

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): A Medical Review**

Neglecting a medical review of obsessive-compulsive disorder would vitally vitiate this vignette. I therefore begin by explaining what OCD is, how it might be contracted, and options for therapy. Afterward, I provide a brief chronology of my

^50 Specifically, visit URL: http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/famous-ocd.shtml
affliction with the disorder followed by several sub-vignettes that offer a glimpse into the personal mental and emotional hell that has marked my ongoing experience with OCD over the past 21 years. These sub vignettes will also highlight specifics steps I took as a self-leader in an attempt to effectively manage the disorder.

The following sub-sections provide a brief overview of OCD including its definition, features, symptoms, history, prevalence, etiology, symptoms, impact on loved ones, and treatments.

**Definition, Features, and Symptoms**

“Obsessions and compulsions are the defining features of obsessive-compulsive disorder” (Taylor and Jang & Asmundson, 2010, p. 672). Aside from being unwanted, obsessive thoughts are viewed by the patient as “unacceptable intrusive and repetitive thoughts, images, or impulses that are … difficult to control, and generally produce distress” (Clark, 2004, p. 5). “Compulsions, on the other hand, are repetitive, stereotyped behaviors or mental acts that are usually performed in response to an obsession in order to prevent or reduce anxiety or distress” (p. 5).

The *American Psychiatric Association’s* Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fourth edition text revision) (2000), hereafter referred to as the DSM-IV-TR, is considered by many to be the authority on technical descriptions of OCD. This standardized manual highlights the following key features of OCD:

The essential features of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder are recurrent obsessions or compulsions … that are serious enough to be time consuming (i.e., they take

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51 The original DSM-IV was first published in the 1990s, with a *Text Revision* (TR) version appearing in 2000. The revised, and much anticipated, DSM-V is scheduled for release in May 2013 (*visit URL: [www.dsm5.org](http://www.dsm5.org) for more information)*.

52 As evidenced by the wide range of writers on the topic of OCD who consistently cite the APA’s DSM-IV.
more than 1 hour a day) or cause marked distress or significant impairment…. At
some point during the disorder, the person has recognized that the obsessions or
compulsions are excessive or unreasonable…. [and] the disturbance is not due to
the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication)
or a general medical condition. (p. 456-457)

Perhaps everyone has experienced an occurrence of obsessive thinking at one
time or another. Furthermore, sometimes an otherwise normal functioning person will
obsess for a period of time about a concrete problem, perplexing dilemma, or difficult
decision they face. Moreover, someone diagnosed with a related disorder to OCD, such
as generalized anxiety disorder, may worry obsessively. It is important to note that none
of these cases produce sufficient cause for an OCD diagnosis because authentic OCD
symptoms differ from circumstance-related or other-disorder influenced obsessions
concern that one may lose one’s job would constitute a worry, not an obsession” (p. 461).
A key contrasting element between obsessive worries and OCD oriented obsessive
thoughts is that the former concerns real world or life issues, while “the content of
[clinical] obsessions does not typically involve real-life problems, and the obsessions are
experienced as inappropriate by the individual (e.g., the intrusive distressing idea that
‘God’ is ‘dog’ spelled backward)” (p. 461). Also, while all people are apt to experience
doubt over one thing or another, OCD related doubting is obsessive to the point of
becoming “pathological” (Maxmen, Ward, & Kilgus, 2009, p. 398). Another key
diagnostic criterion involves a reticence among many OCD patients to disclose the nature
of the thought storms raging behind the closed curtains of their minds, and/or the
compulsive actions that accompany such storms.

People with OCD rarely reveal their symptoms; they are too embarrassed and
keep them a big secret. Clinicians usually must ask gently about the most
common obsessions and compulsions and not wait for patients to offer the information on their own. (Maxmen, et al., 2009, p. 398)\(^{53}\)

The two primary symptoms of OCD are, of course, obsessions and compulsions.

The DSM-IV-TR (2000) defines obsessions as:

Persistent ideas, thoughts, impulses, or images that are experienced as intrusive and inappropriate and that cause marked anxiety or distress. The intrusive and inappropriate quality of the obsessions has been referred to as “ego-dystonic.” This refers to the individual’s sense that the content of the obsession is alien, not within his or her control, and not the kind of thought that he or she would expect to have. However, the individual is able to recognize that the obsessions are the product of his or her own mind and are not imposed from without…. (p. 457)

The most typical categories OCD patients find themselves ruminating on include obsessive thought patterns involving:

(1). Contamination
(2). Repeated doubts
(3). A need to have things in a particular order
(4). Aggressive or horrific impulses
(5). Sexual imagery (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 457)

Because of the distressing nature of such thoughts, those experiencing them will usually invest great effort in attempts to rid their minds of the unwanted mental images. Therefore, “the individual with obsessions usually attempts to ignore or suppress such thoughts or impulses or to neutralize them with some other thought or action (i.e., a compulsion)” (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 457).

Compulsions, then, consist of:

Repetitive behaviors (e.g., hand washing, ordering, checking) or mental acts (e.g., praying, counting, repeating words silently) the goal of which is to prevent or reduce anxiety or distress, not to provide pleasure or gratification. In most cases,

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\(^{53}\) At the request of a family member, I recently talked with a young person who has been struggling with symptoms of OCD. Getting that person to talk openly and in any detail about what they were experiencing proved very difficult for me. Perhaps the single greatest contributor to my own success in managing my OCD over the years has been my willingness to disclose these otherwise hidden thoughts to others (trusted loved ones and mental health professionals). Doing so was not easy, and it was many years after first contracting the symptoms before I felt sufficiently comfortable disclosing the abhorrent details of some of the thought patterns that were especially egregious to me.
the person feels driven to perform the compulsion to reduce the distress that accompanies an obsession or to prevent some dreaded event or situation…. The most common compulsions involve washing and cleaning, counting, checking, requesting or demanding assurances, repeating actions, and ordering. (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 457)

Just as there is a difference between circumstancial mental stress, concern, doubt, or obsessive thought patterns, and clinical, OCD-oriented obsessions, a similar difference exists between personality, or circumstational compulsions, and clinical, OCD-oriented compulsions. In the words of the DSM-IV-TR, “superstitions and repetitive checking behaviors are commonly encountered in everyday life. A diagnosis of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder should be considered only if they are particularly time consuming or result in clinically significant impairment or stress” (p. 462).

Another common string of obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviors involve issues related to religion and spirituality. The connection between OCD and religion/spirituality is so pronounced that it has received its own term: scrupulosity. Scrupulosity is defined as “a psychological disorder primarily characterized by pathological guilt or obsession associated with moral or religious issues that is often accompanied by compulsive moral or religious observance and is highly distressing and maladaptive” (Miller & Hedges, 2008, p. 1042). As the upcoming vignettes will reveal, a significant portion of my own experiences with OCD have involved scrupulosity.

**History**

Written accounts of consistent OCD-related symptom identification can be found in literature dating back to the 1600s. However, such symptoms were usually viewed through a traditional religious lens and were likewise dealt with (i.e., exorcism). By the 1800s, the medical field had taken up interest in the topic. By the early 1900s, OCD was
adopted by the field of psychology, and even approached to some degree by Freud, who attempted to use psychoanalysis to treat the disorder—to little avail (Krockmalik & Menzies, 2003). The post-Freudian twentieth century has been marked largely by “the emergence of the neurobiological and psychological/cognitive perspectives” (p. 6).

Prevalence

OCD “is much more common than previously considered,” and “affects approximately 2% of the population” (Björgvinsson & Hart, 2008, p. 237). It is “the fourth most common psychiatric disorder, more common than schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and panic disorder (Karno, Golding, Sorenson, & Burman, 1988)” (Goodman, 2000). It also “appears cross-culturally around the world with similar prevalence rates” (p. 255). According to the DSM-IV-TR (2000):

Community studies have estimated a lifetime prevalence of 2.5% and a 1-year prevalence of 0.5%-2.1% in adults. However, methodological problems with the assessment tool used raise the possibility that the true prevalence rates are much lower. Community studies of children and adolescents have estimated a lifetime prevalence of 1%-2.3% and a 1-year prevalence of 0.7%. Research indicates that prevalence rates of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder are similar in many different cultures around the world. (p. 460)

When sampling adult populations with OCD, the “disorder is equally common in males and females; however, in childhood-onset Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, the disorder is more common in boys than in girls” (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 459).54

Etiology

“Although the etiology of OCD is not [firmly or precisely] established, neurobiological, genetic, cognitive, [environmental] and behavioral factors have all been

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54 According to Bland, Orn, and Newman (1988), “OCD is somewhat more common among women compared to men” (Himle, Chatters, Taylor, Nguyen, 2011, p. 241). This study, however, is older and more regionally exclusive than the information presented in the DSM-IV-TR.
implicated” (Björgvinsson & Hart, 2008, p.255). Rachman and Hodgson (1980) attribute, in part, certain inborn personality traits to be related to the onset of OCD. In other words, they “make … allowance for some constitutional predisposition or vulnerability” (p. 117) in some persons more than others.

As a first assumption, we have to allow for the possibility that there is some degree of personal vulnerability or excessive sensitivity to criticism (including guilt) in the absence of which the person will not develop obsessional behavior. It has been proposed by a variety of writers that people who are prone to develop neurotic disorders are oversensitive—particularly to frustration and punishment. In some accounts great emphasis is placed on social punishment. (p. 117)

However, Rachman and Hodgson (1980) also “speculate about the environmental events that are likely to be involved in the development of obsessional complaints” (p. 117). Specifically, they cite familial circumstances where “parents are overcontrolling and overprotective” (p. 117), or “overcritical” (p. 117). “In these cases a parental model may facilitate the growth of obsessional troubles in the child…” (p. 118).

Other variables enter the question as well. For example, the pathogenesis of OCD is also influenced by genetic and hereditary variables (see Maxmen, Ward, & Kilgus, 2009 and Goodman, 2000). My father has bi-polar disorder and several of my siblings have, at one time or another, been on medication for depression. I know of at least one other individual in my immediate and/or extended family (either side) with professionally diagnosed OCD. I have also observed minor-moderate symptoms of OCD and/or

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55 This was very much the case with me, and my contracting of OCD. In many ways throughout my life, I have been a deeply oversensitive person with a tendency to takes things inordinately personal.
56 Fortunately, my parental situation was marked by quite the opposite. Both my parents were more apt to praise than to criticize. Moreover, they were usually not overprotective, and they provided me with a healthy degree of personal freedom as a child and teenager.
57 My father was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in the mid-1990s. Since then, several of my siblings have been diagnosed with depression. Typically, OCD and depressional disorders are treated medicinally with similar drugs. In my most recent return to pharmacotherapy, I have found the most benefit from the same drug (Citalopram [Celexa]) that my siblings who have struggled with depression have also found to be the most beneficial. My psychiatrist told me that it is not uncommon for immediate family members to respond similarly to a given drug.
obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) in other members of my family; however, it should be clearly noted that such observations do not represent a diagnosis.

“Individuals with neurological disorders and brain insults due to trauma or infection are [also] more prone to develop OCD” (p. 401). Moreover, there is evidence that sufferers of OCD possess “abnormalities in the frontal lobes, basal ganglia, and cingulus areas of [the brain]” (p. 401).  

The DSM-IV-TR (2000) provides a further explanation about the typical onset of OCD:

Although Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder usually begins in adolescence or early adulthood, it may begin in childhood. Model age at onset is earlier in males than in females: between ages 6 and 15 years for males and between ages 20 and 29 years for females. For the most part, onset is gradual, but acute onset has been noted in some cases. The majority of individuals have a chronic waxing and waning course, with exacerbation of symptoms that may be related to stress. About 15% show progressive deterioration in occupational and social functioning. About 5% have an episodic course with minimal or no symptoms between episodes. (p. 460)

According to the DSM-IV-TR (2002), “recurrent or intrusive thoughts, impulses, images, or behaviors may occur in the context of many other mental disorders. A diagnosis of OCD is not assigned if the content of the thoughts or the activities is exclusively related to another mental disorder” (p. 460). Other disorders that may be related to OCD, or present obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors, but do not represent OCD include:

- Anxiety Disorder Due to a General Medical Condition
- Substance-Induced Anxiety Disorder

58 To date, I have not been tested for said neural abnormalities; therefore, I am unaware of the existence of such if they do exist in my brain.
59 My first intense OCD symptoms occurred at age 10 and then receded (with some lapses) until I was 12 years and nine months old, when they returned to stay. While the intensity of my symptoms has undulated by degree and kind over the past two decades, I am still not “cured.” It is a disorder I live with and manage, but one that I have yet to entirely overcome. Chances are high that I will never overcome it entirely in this life.
Symptoms: A Classic Pattern

A mental health counselor has personally described OCD to me (as a patient) as a three-step, cyclical process. She explained that the first step is the onset of the intrusive, unwanted, obsessive thought(s), which inevitably triggers anxiety and discomfort. The second step is the tendency on the part of the individual to engage in a ritualistic, compulsive-oriented thought or behavior performed in hopes of alleviating the anxiety induced by the obsessive thought. The third step involves experiencing a feeling of relief from the obtrusive, obsessive thought by virtue of having acted out the compulsion. Were the pattern to terminate after step three, all would be well; no one would suffer from clinical OCD. Unfortunately for sufferers of OCD, that is usually just the beginning, a mere first completed revolution of many yet to come in an insidious cycle. The relief, usually short-lived, is extirpated upon re-entrance of the obsessive thought on the mind’s stage. The figure below represents this triadic cycle of OCD symptoms, or as I will refer to it hereafter: the “Classic OCD Cycle.”

60 If my memory serves me correctly, it was a she; however, honestly, I don’t remember for sure which counselor taught me this cycle. It may have been a male.
Other authors have written on this general cycle in various ways and to varying degrees. For example, de Silva (2003) presents a construct that incorporates the three elements described above; however, in doing so, she also adds several other elements to more fully describe the detailed experience one goes through in a classic OCD cycle or revolution. What I was taught—and have likewise introduced herein—as a “cycle,” de Silva (2003) introduces as a list of “constituent elements” (p. 24). These elements include a “trigger” (p. 24), an “obsession” (p. 25), “a feeling of discomfort” (p. 25), a “compulsive urge” (p. 25), “compulsive behaviour [sic]” (p. 26), and “discomfort reduction” (p. 26).

Another of my mental health counselors along the way described it another way. He explained that the average human being has all kinds of would-be thoughts waiting to enter our minds at any given moment. According to this doctor, many of these would-be thoughts are unwanted; however, the brain possesses something akin to a “screen” that filters many of these would-be thoughts from actually reaching the stages of our
conscious minds. This filter, or “screen,” helps us from becoming overwhelmed with ideas or images that are not conducive or helpful to one’s daily *modus operandi*. He then explained that when a person has OCD, the little holes in one’s screen (or filter) are enlarged, thus allowing a slew of thoughts to pass through that would, under normal circumstances, be checked at the gate of the conscious mind and rejected cognitive entrance. He further explained that the intended purpose of psychotropic pharmacotherapy (drug treatments such as *selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors* [SSRIs]) is to assist the mind in reducing the holes in the mind’s screen to a normal and acceptable size.

**Impact on Loved Ones**

Having OCD may have negative effects on family members and loved ones of the person afflicted. Substantial percentages of those with OCD (presumably the more serious cases) do not marry, and if they do, they tend to marry later in life and have trouble sustaining healthy marital relationships (de Silva, 2003). Negative effects can impact other family members as well. In more serious cases, these effects can include “serious disruption of family functioning and overt conflict” (p. 36).

While serving my LDS mission, my mission president made the comment to me in one of our interviews that OCD would affect my future responsibilities as a husband and father. I interpreted his verbalized observation to be a vitally important caveat about my future, which served as a key motivator to me to “attack” OCD with exceptional vigor upon re-entering psychotherapy after returning home from my mission. This motivation was engendered by my desperate desire to avoid the kinds of unfortunate preclusions of, and/or damages to, family life that I knew OCD had the potential to incur.
Treatments

Contemporary methods of treating OCD include both “pharmacological and psychological” (Kyrios, 2003, p. 261) approaches. This is consistent with my own therapeutic experiences, which have always involved either cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy and/or drug treatments. Other treatment options that will be covered in this section include:

- Exposure response prevention (ERP)
- Homeopathy
- Neurosurgery
- Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS)
- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)
- Progressive relaxation training (PRT)
- Self-help
- Religious and/or spiritual approaches

Cognitive-behavioral approach.

What was once cognitive and/or behavioral therapy has since merged into cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Yaryura-Tobias & Neziroglu, 1997). According to Arbuthnott, Arbuthnott, and Thompson (2006), “Psychotherapy is a process of problem solving” (p. 7), a point corroborated by Peck (1978, 1997). A key component of contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches involve both the cognitive and behavioral elements of a patient or client’s being. It starts in the psychotherapist’s office with cognitive therapy since “human mental capacities are the raw materials with which psychotherapists work” (p. 1). Behavioral approaches usually follow as a hand-in-hand compliment to cognitive therapy. Thus the onus of responsibility falls on the patient to do his or her behavioral homework in between sessions.

According to Clark (2004):
Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for OCD is a psychological treatment that utilizes both cognitive and behavioral therapeutic change strategies to achieve reductions in obsessive and compulsive symptoms by modifying the faulty appraisals, specific core beliefs, and dysfunctional neutralization responses that are implicated in the etiology and persistence of obsessional complaints. (p. 187)

Simply stated, cognitive therapy (CT) focuses on what a patient is thinking, and behavioral therapy (BT) focuses on what a patient is doing; the combined goal being to minimize, diminish, and/or (if possible) eliminate neurotic thought processes and their concomitant behaviors. CBT is usually undertaken with a licensed professional counselor, psychologist, or clinical psychiatrist. According to Rachman (2003), “Obsessions [will] persist for as long as the misinterpretations persist, and these in turn will continue unless and until new evidence and/or arguments overturn the misinterpretations” (p. 19), hence the implicit essentiality of including elements of cognitive-behavioral therapy in treating nearly all cases of OCD.

In my own experience with OCD, cognitive therapy consisted of an ongoing effort to work through whatever thoughts and/or behaviors were causing me difficulty, trouble, or pain of mind, heart, or life. One of the concrete ways we (my counselor and I) tackled this was by utilizing Burns’ (2009) ten fundamental cognitively distorted thought patterns. These include:

1. All-or-nothing thinking
2. Overgeneralization
3. Mental filter
4. Disqualifying the positive
5. Jumping to conclusions
6. Magnification (catastrophizing) or minimization
7. Emotional reasoning

However, in some cases (like my own), an individual may work with (and even find successful results from) a semi-professional counselor (i.e., graduate student in some field related to mental health science), or perhaps even a lay-counselor, as in the case of the homespun psychotherapeutic cognitive-behavioral oriented work I engaged in with the help of my older brother Joe and other family members, who played the role of lay-counselor in my on-going efforts to combat the disorder.
8). Should statements
9). Labeling and mislabeling
10). Personalization (Burns, 2009, p. 42-43)

I was given a copy of Burns’ list from the clinic where I was being treated, and much of the cognitive work I underwent in psychotherapy involved confronting my own cognitively distorted thought processes. The way I saw it, the goal of psychotherapy was to gain new cognitive insights in order to subsequently go out and behaviorally apply those insights to apprehend, confront, and then begin normalizing my own cognitive distortions in the practice of my daily life. One of the specific forms of behavioral therapy I learned about and applied in concert with my ongoing psychotherapeutic cognitive work was exposure response prevention (ERP).

**Exposure response prevention (ERP).**

Exposure-response prevention (treatment), or ERP, is a form of therapy that is behaviorally based (Kyrios, 2003) and provides a counterintuitive solution to diminishing obsessive and/or compulsive symptoms. In ERP, “patients [actually] … confront anxiety-provoking or otherwise distressing situations or triggers, either directly … or through imagination” (p. 261-262). Then, having confronted the obsessive rumination head on, the patient attempts to avoid giving in to the behavioral compulsion they feel compelled to act out in response. Or, if a given obsession lacks a concomitant compulsion, then the patient will actually consciously ruminate on the very thought one dreads thinking (rather than vainly [obsessively] attempting to avoid it) until the thought’s power and control over the patient begins to diminish. This form of therapy allows the patient to proverbially “fight fire with fire,” and is often used in the treatment of phobias. Through repeated efforts to expose and respond to one’s obsessions and
compulsions, some (myself included) find a diminishment of their symptoms over time. In general, psychological therapies and/or medicinal treatments such as ERP “are considered effective in the treatment of OCD” (Kyrios, 2003, p. 266). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest, “that ERP [actually] leads to functional brain changes similar to those seen following [medicinal treatments]” (p. 265). My own experience with ERP leads me to believe that this point applies to more than just ERP, but more generally to all cognitive-behavioral therapy. This is particularly significant when discussing the role that Self-Leadership must ultimately play in successfully confronting OCD symptoms because cognitive and/or behavioral therapies (such as ERP) usually require the Self-Leadership necessary to produce the willingness and courage to engage in the therapeutic process, which may prove difficult, and temporarily painful. The implications are that if productively and effectively engaged, self-led cognitive-behavioral therapy and ERP can actually lead to neurological and/or chemical changes in the brain that lead to healthier cognitive functioning and behavioral application. The extraordinary importance of this fact, and the potential power it affords self-leaders afflicted with OCD and/or other mental illnesses, should not be underestimated. Furthermore, unlike pharmacotherapeutic (medicinal/drug) approaches, which often require ongoing usage, cognitive-behavioral approaches that succeed may engender lasting neurobiological/chemical changes in a patient. I have personally experienced evidence of ERP and CBT’s potential to change neurobiological functioning as I have successfully engaged ERP and/or CBT in an effort to curb and/or effectively manage my own OCD. While I do not possess quantitative data to prove that my own neurobiology/chemistry has undergone actual physical alterations through such therapy, obvious qualitative changes to my own thought
processes, behavioral responses, and quality of mental hygiene and life (including a
tremendous decrease in OCD-influenced symptoms such as anxiety, dread, fear, guilt, et
cetera) suggest to me that such positive changes have indeed occurred in the
neurobiological systems of my body and mind.

**Pharmacotherapy.**

Pharmacotherapeutic approaches (i.e., drug treatments) are commonly used to
treat OCD just like clinical depression and other neuroses. “The most effective drugs for
OCD symptoms appear to be … serotonin reuptake inhibitors” (SRIs) (Steketee, 1993, p.
55). SSRIs, or *selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors*, is another common name to
describe the medications typically used to treat OCD. According to McDonough (2003),
common SRIs used to treat OCD include (generic names in parentheses): Clomipramine
(Anafranil), Fluoxetine (Prozac), Paroxetine (Paxil), Fluvoxamine (Luvox), Sertraline
(Zoloft), and Citalopram (Celexa). McDonough (2003) also notes that these different
medicinal approaches “are felt to have equal efficacy” (p. 294).^62

“Numerous [other] drugs have been reported effective for OCD patients in case
studies, but either have not been tested in controlled trials or have shown little usefulness
in such trials” (Steketee, 1993, p. 57). It is also interesting to note that while some
research shows that pharmacotherapeutic results transcend their placebo counterparts,
behavior therapy ultimately trumps them both in overall benefit. It has also been shown
that higher percentages of behaviorally treated patients report positive long-term benefits
than those who merely continue with pharmacotherapy alone. However, when drugs are

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^62 Generally speaking: however, a given individual may respond better to one medication over another.
This has been the case in my own medicinal treatment regimens. While I have tried several different
medications over the years, one in particular (citalopram [celexa]) has tended to provide me with the best
overall results.
used in conjunction with behavior [and cognitive] therapy, the positive effects can, in some cases, prove to be greater than either method applied alone, although the research spoken of above did not present a significant advantage (Steketee, 1993, see p. 44-63). 63, 64

Common side effects of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) include: “Nausea, dry mouth, trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, weakness, tiredness, drowsiness, dizziness, increased sweating, blurred vision, or yawning.” If such symptoms “persist or worsen,” a patient is instructed to tell their doctor. (First Databank, Inc., 2012a, Citalopram [Celexa]). More serious, but less common side effects for which a patient should contact their doctor include: “shaking (tremor), restlessness, inability to keep still, decreased interest in sex, changes in sexual ability, numbness/tingling, easy bruising/bleeding, fast/irregular heartbeat, muscle weakness/spasm, seizures” (First Databank, Inc., 2012b, Paroxetine [Paxil]). Very serious, but less common side effects for which immediate medical attention should be sought include “black/bloody stools, vomit that looks like coffee grounds … hallucinations, unusual restlessness, loss of coordination, fast heartbeat, severe dizziness, unexplained fever, severe

63 In my own therapeutic approaches, there is no doubt that cognitive-behavioral therapy (and especially behavior therapy) has made the biggest difference in my long-term improvement. The use of medication to supplement the CBT process has a way of (as one of my counselors once put it) “taking the edge off” of my obsessive, compulsive, and depressive symptoms. The welcomed absence of this “edge” has, for me personally, helped to maximize the effectiveness of any counselor facilitated and/or self-led efforts at CBT.

64 This research specifically looked at the serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRIs) Clomipramine (Anafranil), Fluoxetine (Prozac), and Fluvoxamine (Luvox). I have personally taken Anafranil and Luvox. Luvox seemed to help a lot, Anafranil not so much. The most effective drugs I’ve taken to date have been Celexa (Citalopram), Lexapro (Escitalopram Oxalate), and Effexor (Venlafaxine). Celexa (Citalopram) is the drug I have been prescribed most commonly, and I believe, has been the most effective overall.

65 First Databank refers to the company that manufactured the medication I was prescribed while in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada. Because I was living in Newfoundland at the time, I obtained drug information sheets from my local pharmacy on several different medications used to treat anxiety, OCD, depression, et cetera that were all created by the same company: First Databank. For more information about First Databank, visit URL: www.fdbhealth.com
nausea/vomiting/diarrhea, twitching muscles” (First Databank, Inc., 2011d, Sertraline [Zoloft]).

Other medications used to treat OCD that are not specifically selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors include: Venlafaxine (Effexor),66 Clomipramine (Anafranil),67 Alprazolam (Xanax),68 and Fluoxetine (Prozac).69

**Homeopathy.**

Simblist (1998) promotes homeopathic treatments that could potentially align effectively with various Self-Leadership strategies. His holistic homeopathic approach includes “a humane and caring approach” (p. 20) that focuses on a comprehensive treatment plan that includes the:

- Different forms of vibrational medicine e.g. flower or shell essences.
- Counseling, psychotherapy or group therapy.
- Regression techniques to confirm facts e.g. kinesiology, hypnotherapy.
- Various forms of energy clearing techniques, breath and bodywork.
- Techniques to change a person’s “core beliefs” e.g. affirmations.
- Meditation and raised spiritual consciousness.
- The homeopathic similimum (p. 20).

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66 “Venlafaxine is known as a serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI)” (First Databank, Inc., 2011e, Venlafaxine).
67 Clomipramine “belongs to a class of medications called tricyclic antidepressants” (First Databank, Inc., 2011b, Clomipramine).
68 Alprazolam “belongs to a class of medications called benzodiazepines which act on the brain and nerves (central nervous system) to produce a calming effect” (First Databank, Inc., 2011a, Alprazolam).
69 “Fluoxetine is used to treat depression, panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder, a certain eating disorder (bulimia), and a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (premenstrual dysphoric disorder)” (First Databank, Inc., 2011c, Fluoxetine).
Simblist’s homeopathic approach focuses on the Self-Leadership component of raising self-awareness. Two particular statements in his article have been particularly influential on the way I view my duty to deal responsibly with my own OCD.

Our aim should be to raise a victim’s awareness to the level where they know they have a choice – a choice to think what they want to think and a choice not to be victims of intrusive thoughts or compulsions any more. This naturally involves healing very negative thought patterns built up over years and releasing bottled up emotions. The main thrust, I think, should be to free patients enough so they perceive the underlying story of their own lives and to help them release energy enough to enable them to rewrite the “script.” Various therapies may palliate but will not permanently cure as long as the patient’s miasm remains active. (p. 19)

Simblist (1998) further emphasize the role that Self-Leadership (not his words) must take in the effective treatment of OCD.

In general I think patients will need to take responsibility for their condition and work quite intensely with a number of different healing methods, particularly some form of psychotherapy, and be prepared to make changes to their lifestyle…. Most of all, patients must realise [sic] that compulsive behaviour [sic] began with a choice at some level, and conscious choice is the key to breaking it. (p. 19)

When I read Simblist’s article back in high school (it was one of the first, if not the first, scholarly article I read on OCD) I was deeply impacted by his assertion that I had a choice; I did not ultimately have to be a victim of my OCD and/or depression. His words rang true for me then, and they ring even truer for me today now that I have a successful track record of effectively managing my OCD. The implantation of this idea in my brain—that I could choose to do something about my OCD—signaled the beginning of my personal journey towards effectively combating OCD with Self-Leadership and other self- and counselor-led strategies.

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70 Simblist is an Australian scholar who writes usung traditional British spellings of some words.
Other treatments.

According to Twohig, Hayes, Plumb, Pruitt, Collins, Hazlett-Stevens, and Woidneck (2010): “Effective treatments for obsessive-compulsive disorder exist, but additional treatments options are needed” (p. 705). Other, lesser-known treatments not already discussed also exist as options for combating OCD. One example is neurosurgery. Such an approach is not common and “over the past three decades, … has become more than ever an intervention of last resort” (McDonough, 2003, p. 308). Some patients, but not all, who undergo neurosurgery find great benefits (Maxmen, Ward, & Kilgus, p. 403). “Non-invasive, repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS)” also “shows some promise in treating OCD” by “targeting magnetic waves to the caudate nucleus or prefrontal cortex” (Maxmen, Ward, & Kilgus, 2009, p. 403).

Two other examples of alternative treatments include acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and progressive relaxation training (PRT). Both were recently compared and contrasted in a randomized clinical trial wherein researchers found ACT to be preferable over PRT based on the results of their study (Twohig, et al., 2010).

Other, less scientific methods also exist; for example, Bennett (2010), a self-proclaimed mentalist (who is also a motivational speaker and entertainer) found greater success combating his own bout with OCD through self-help oriented methods and spirituality than he did with medication. He promotes the power of one’s own mind in combating the demon of the mind that OCD represents; however, he also found benefits from counseling and advises others that, “we shouldn’t fight OCD or any other illness on
our own” (p. 144). As the forthcoming vignette demonstrates, I (Jensen, 2005) found great help through a combination of professional, ecclesiastical, and/or lay counseling, medication, and self-led approaches that involved spirituality. Religion, spirituality, prayer, and fasting have played a particularly salient role in my combined efforts to successfully battle my OCD. According to Himle, Chatters, Taylor, and Nguyen (2011): “There has been considerable interest in the relationship between religious practice and OCD” (p. 242). Religion in general has been known to be a two-edged sword providing both benefits and detriments to persons suffering from OCD and/or other mental illnesses. In the words of Himle, et al. (2011):

> Religion and religious involvement have been associated with higher levels of physical and mental health at both the individual and population level. However, in addition to the positive influences of religion on health, there are specific instances in which religious content and behaviors are associated with health problems. (p. 256)

Such as been my own experience with religion and OCD. While the lasting benefits have ultimately outweighed the temporary drawbacks, those drawbacks still existed to provide obstacles for me to grow through as I sought for transcendence.

While much progress has been made in the world of mental health in regards to treatments of OCD, more work is needed. To repeat the words of Twohig, et al., (2010): “Effective treatments for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) exist, but additional treatment options are needed” (p. 705).

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71 In my book (Jensen, 2005), I anonymously share some of my own experiences with OCD by using the pseudonym “Kevin.” At the time, I was not ready to publicly disclose my struggles with OCD as I do in this treatise.
Prioritizing treatment methods.

The collective research on obsessive-compulsive disorder to date makes it clear that a combination of treatment methods will almost certainly produce better results than focusing on one method in isolation. Determining the specific combination of treatment methods should take place on an individual basis in consultation with one’s mental healthcare provider.

Nevertheless, the extant research seems to suggest that generally speaking, psychotherapy (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy and/or exposure-response prevention) should virtually always be a primary treatment option, with pharmacotherapy and/or other options being added as secondary treatment tools as needed/desired. According to Yanyura-Tobias and Neziroglu (1997), “Research indicates that [OCD] patients who have undergone behavior therapy have fewer relapses compared to those [patients] on medication alone (Marks, Stern, Mawson, Cobb, & McDonald, 1980)” (p. 59), while a “discontinuance of medications for patients who have never received behavior therapy … leads to a 80%-90% chance of relapse (Pato, Hill, & Murphy, 1990; Pato, Zohar-Kadouch, Zohar, et al., 1988)” (p. 59).

Self-Leadership oriented (self-help) and/or spiritual/religious treatment methods can then be applied to clinical approaches based on the needs and desires of the patient. With this said, patients should be forthcoming about their utilization of such approaches in counseling sessions, and counselors should be aware that such approaches may be at the risk of becoming a hostage of the patient’s OCD, in which case therapy may take a counterproductive turn for the worse.
Religious Scrupulosity, or ROCD

It is likely that health care professionals in the future will focus increasingly on religion and spirituality as it relates to both mental health and illness, including as it relates to OCD specifically since “a substantial body of research has [already] indicated that religiousness and spirituality are associated with mental health and illness” (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Pargement, and Krumrei, 2009, p. 180). Himle, Chatters, Taylor, and Nguyen (2011) have even coined a new term and acronym to describe OCD as it is “related to religious content” p. 242). They call it ROCD.

Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, and Siev (2010) recently conducted a study among Jews to find out if “orthodox affiliation was related to recognition of scrupulosity [or ROCD] as obsessive-compulsive disorder.” They define religious scrupulosity as follows:

Scrupulosity is a manifestation of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD characterized by guilt or obsessions with religious or moral issues and/or compulsive religious or moral observances that are distressing and maladaptive (Miller & Hedges, 2008). The clinical presentation of obsessions may include nonculturally sanctioned fears that one has committed or will commit sins, clinically distressing intrusive blasphemous or sacrilegious thoughts/mental images, and excessive fears that one will go to hell or otherwise be punished by God (Abramowitz, Huppert, Cohen, Tolin, & Cahill, 2002). Associated compulsions may include nonnormative prayer, repetitive or otherwise nonculturally sanctioned performance of religious practices, excessive confession or reassurance seeking from religious authorities and efforts to avoid the possibility of sin (Olatunji, Abramowitz, Williams, Connolly, & Lohr, 2007). (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 930-931)

Rosmarin, et al. (2010), explain that despite the successes of cognitive-behavioral and exposure response prevention in dealing with OCD generally speaking, “clinical research suggests that the presence of religious obsessions predicts poorer treatment outcomes even after controlling for symptom severity (Mataix-Cols, Marks, Greist, Kobak, & Baer, 2002; Nelson, Abramowitz, Whiteside, & Deacon, 2006)” (Rosmarin, et
al., 2010, p. 931). They consider this to be a “significant concern considering that an estimated 24-33% of clinical OCD cases present with religious symptoms (Antony, Downie, & Swinson, 1998; Mataix-Cols et al., 2002;Abramaowitz et al., 2002)” (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 931). They go on to emphasize that,

It has been estimated that 5% of OCD outpatients in the United States report religious obsessions and compulsions as their primary presenting problem (Tolin, Abramowitz, Kozak, & Foa, 2001), and estimates of the prevalence of religious symptoms among OCD patients in the Middle East have been as high as 83% (Greenburg & Shefler, 2002). (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 931)

They admit that “several factors may contribute to the treatment resistant nature of scrupulosity” (p. 931), but emphasize that “community attitudes towards the disorder may have a particularly important role” (p. 931). This is because of the tendency of “religious communities [to] normalize symptoms of scrupulosity given their likeness to religious practices [thereby causing the] … scrupulosity [to] be viewed as an indication of piety at the community level, and its symptoms may therefore be reinforced through praise” (p. 931). When this happens, their tends to be more resistance to getting professional help by either the patient, or the patient’s inner circle. For example:

Normalization of scrupulosity by religious communities may lead to perceptions of secular professional treatment as an affront to religious values and lifestyles; this may account for the considerable resistance that many individuals with scrupulosity demonstrate towards secular professional treatment (Miller & Hedges, 2008). A failure at the community level to recognize scrupulosity as OCD may further decrease motivation to engage in treatment or lead to poor insight, a feature that is commonly associated with scrupulosity (Abramowitz, 2001). (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 931-932)

Additionally, members of the clergy may unknowingly or unwittingly contribute to the negative symptoms of religious scrupulosity (or ROCD) by mistaking a patient’s symptoms (e.g. blasphemous, immoral sexual, or violent thoughts) to be sinful rather than clinical. There is a big difference between the two, and clergy who fail to correctly
identify the difference can do much damage to a patient-parishioner whose mental hygiene may already be tottering. Himle, Chatters, Taylor, and Nguyen (2011) assert it is essential:

That the clergy member holds the belief that religious obsessions are not sinful and that they do not need to be confessed or countered with prayer. When clergy do judge ROCD complaints as sinful and possibly associated with a loss of salvation, sharing this belief with an ROCD sufferer can have a devastating effect. [Such] feedback is likely to encourage the person with ROCD to attempt to suppress negative thoughts even more diligently and to perform compulsive behaviors according to even more exacting standards which will likely result in further worsening of OCD symptoms and associated functional impairments. In these circumstances, it is advisable for clergy to refer the person with ROCD to another spiritual advisor if possible. On a related note, it is important for mental health clinicians to determine whether a clergyperson holds beliefs that could be counterproductive before sending an ROCD sufferer for spiritual consultation. (p. 256)

This is not to insinuate in any way that a deep understanding and/or conscientious adherence to religious principle and doctrine would blur the otherwise clear dichotomy that should separate thoughts of a sinful nature from thoughts of an obsessive, clinical nature. In fact, the opposite may be the case, as evidenced by the research of Rosmarin, et al., (2010), which led them to conclude that, “familiarity with Orthodox practices [actually] increases sensitivity to distinctions between scrupulosity and normative religion, thereby increasing recognition of the need of professional treatment [in cases of scrupulosity]” (p. 930). In other words, those who were highly familiar with and faithful to the doctrines and practices of the faith were more likely to be able to effectively distinguish between legitimate religious faith, practice, and piety, and obsessive-compulsive influenced religious scrupulosity.

While I am a Mormon, not a Jew, my own experiences with religious scrupulosity (or ROCD), as well as the experiences of those in my family and church who reached out
to help me (or who I reached out to for help) seem to align with Rosmarin, et al.’s 2010 findings. For example, all immediate family members I interviewed in the course of this study are devout (orthodox) Mormons, and the most common of my OCD symptoms mentioned in the interviews involved their recognition of my scrupulosity with honesty, which was very much tied to religious instruction I (and they) had received as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Fortunately, for me, my family members and religious community (including LDS Church leaders and officers) were able to consistently and effectively distinguish between faithful religious practice and religious scrupulosity as they relate to the Mormon faith. Never once did a Mormon leader or counselor suggest to me that my legitimately clinical obsessions were sinful; rather they sought to help me with my ROCD neurosis in a caring and supportive manner.\(^7\) This was enormously helpful as I worked through my ROCD because I was able to receive numerous clarifying perspectives and positive reinforcement from all sides of my orthodox religious family and (Mormon) community. This helped me to realize that I did, in fact, have a clinical problem I needed to work through; my ROCD symptoms did not represent a “normal” or “acceptable” practice of Mormonism, even from an orthodox perspective. The combination between Rosmarin, et al.’s 2010 findings among orthodox and non-orthodox Jews, and my own experiences with orthodox and non-orthodox Mormons in my own family and community have led me to believe that orthodox religious living can ultimately translate into a positive, productive lifestyle that may even better prepare one to effectively differentiate between faithful adherence to religious doctrine and obsessive-compulsive, religious scrupulosity than if one were not

\(^7\) And my mission president even referred me to professional counseling once he felt my symptoms were beyond his ability to adequately counsel, support, and help from a spiritual standpoint.
as knowledgeable about and dedicated to one’s practice of faith, especially if one is aware of and/or educated in issues related to mental health. Moreover, it may be that orthodox knowledge and dedication may even better prepare someone to provide efficacious assistance to a person with OCD than someone less knowledgeable and/or committed to one’s faith, and again, especially if one is already aware of and/or educated in issues related to mental health. My own experiences would certainly support this hypothesis.

To date, empirical research on this subject has only been done on persons of the Jewish faith, and would therefore need to be done on other faiths to get a better overall understanding of how the findings translate (or not) to other religions. Based on the research cited earlier about the extremely high percentage of “religious symptoms among OCD patients in the Middle East [which] have been as high as 83% (Greenburn & Shefler, 2002)” (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 931), it is evident that Rosmarin, et al.’s 2010 findings among Jews are not automatically transferrable to other religions, even though my own perspectives of, and experiences in, the Mormon community do seem to mirror their findings.

An interesting area of future research would be to investigate the link between obsessive-compulsive religious scrupulosity and religious fundamentalism, especially as it relates to Islamic fundamentalist extremism, since research already shows that OCD patients in the Middle East experience a far greater “prevalence of religious symptoms” (Rosmarin, et al., 2010, p. 931) than their Western counterparts. My own personal experiences lead me to believe that OCD has the potential to become an insidious ingredient that inevitably exacerbates any and/or all tendencies towards religious
fundamentalism of all kinds. Were it not for a highly supportive religious family and community who helped me see where I was once becoming extreme, I may have ended up a committed extremist myself—to my own detriment and that of others as well. Fortunately, with the help of a balanced religious family and community and wise mental health care professionals, I have been able to deal effectively with OCD-influenced extremist tendencies to thereby avoiding going too far off into left or right field in the long run. The result has been to realize for myself a similar kind of balance and quality of life that those in my family, community, and health care circle enjoy themselves.
OCD and Me

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I attempt to vividly describe specific examples of the hell I experienced with OCD. These symptoms first appeared in 1990, and have continued—although greatly evolved and significantly diminished—up to the present day.

A Poetic Preface

Coarsly Crossed

Coarsly crossed, the angst-filled smart 
Of agony did fill my heart.  
An outgrowth of my humbling path,  
Bedecked with the refiners wrath,  
That ripped my soul and taxed my mind,  
Beat me through life’s unending grind,  
That was ordained to make a King,  
Who after night is o’er will sing  
A thousand praises to the Cause,  
That aided an end to my flaws.  
As to the realms of royal right,  
I will transcend the cold dark night,  
And gratefully begin to see  
The road into eternity’s  
A path that starts and ends with He.  
And all between depends on me!

– Jordan Jensen

The Girl with the Burns

The full intensity of my OCD did not bear down upon me until the summer of 1992, in between my sixth and seventh grade years. My first salient skirmish with the disorder, however, began in August 1990. I was nine years old, and within a month of my tenth birthday. It was summer time and my family, who lived in Arizona during the

73 Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 41).
school year, was in Utah for summer break. One day during that concluding month of
summer in between fourth and fifth grade, I was flipping through the pages of a magazine
when I came across a story of a young girl who had been badly burned in a fire, but had
survived. Accompanying the story were some pictures of the girl. There was a photo of
her before her accident and a picture or two showing what she looked like in her burned
condition afterward. The latter pictures were exceedingly disturbing to me, and the
image thereof filled my mind with fear, dread, and even horror. Against my will, my
brain latched on to the post-fire pictures of the girl and refused to let go. The hideous
pictures of the girl’s scalded flesh and disfigured face wedged in my memory and began
to haunt me. I started experiencing unwanted, obtrusive, fear induced thoughts about the
picture—especially at night in the dark after I would go to bed. One dark night after I
had gone to bed in a downstairs bedroom of my maternal grandmother’s home, I began
obsessing about the image of the burned girl. The obsessions turned into an intense,
irrational fear that the girl, who so resembled a monster to me, would somehow sneak in
the house (through the window in my room or something) and “get me.” I became so
frightened I began to sob uncontrollably until my older brother (who was 12 years older
than me and in college) came in, turned on the light, and was able to eventually comfort
me.

Fortunately, these episodes did not persist indefinitely, and soon I was back to my
happy, normal self for a while; that was the good news. The bad news was that this was
merely the first episode in a relentless string of future episodes of different strains of
OCD-patterned thoughts and actions to come in the future. All-too-soon the day arrived
when obsession after obsession would perplexingly cause me continual distress over a
prolonged period of time. The following two years, I was mostly OCD free. By the 
summer of 1992, however, I found myself thrust into the thick of an oppressive 
psychological jungle of OCD and later depression where I would wage war on behalf my 
own happiness, mental hygiene, and sanity for the better part of two decades.

The Unpardonable Sin

I grew up in a religious family. We valued faith, fellowship, and freedom. 
Moreover, as a boy I was, by nature, both spiritual and religious. The combination of this 
spiritually religious background and personal penchant for the didactic precipitated a 
plentiful proclivity for the pious all on its own; no other source of activation (or in my 
case, hyper-activation) was needed. But like it or not, my OCD caused a neurotic 
inflammation of what I consider to be an otherwise positive and healthy component of 
my life: my religious faith, and I fell prey to scrupulosity (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, & Siev, 
2011), or religious OCD (ROCD) (Himle, Chatters, Taylor, & Nguyen, 2011). In this 
vignette, I share one such experience that occurred back in 1992 when I was just starting 
junior high (7th grade). At this point in time, I was still four-plus years away from 
receiving a clinical diagnosis for a disorder of whose symptoms I was just beginning to 
become acquainted.

Regardless of one’s personal persuasions or sectarian affiliation in matters related 
to religious faith, he or she will likely be schooled in a hierarchy of holiness and 
unholiness. Such spectrums of sinfulness are rooted in the doctrines of the denomination 
to which a person is devoted. According to my church’s theology, the severest of all sins 
involves becoming a “son of perdition,” which occurs by denying the Holy Ghost. The 
scriptures are clear on this point: “For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has
had place in you, and ye know ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable."74

At some point, my obsessive thought tendencies—which had been steadily increasing in both regularity and intensity—took hold of the belief that I could, by merely thinking the words, become a heretic guilty of this most heinous of sins against God. Indeed, I believed for a period of time—to the egregious angst-filled agitation of my mind, heart, and soul—that the mere mental repetition of the words, “I deny God, Jesus Christ, and/or the Holy Ghost” (even if the cognition was involuntary, and even if I did not vocally state the same, or mean the words in my heart) was tantamount to denying the Holy Ghost and could make me a candidate for becoming a son of perdition. Of course, the very nature of obsessive thought patterns is to think about and visualize the unthinkable. The more I desired not to think or do something, the more apt my mind was to ruminate on the very thoughts I so disdained. I loved God. I loved Jesus Christ. I had received the Gift of the Holy Ghost after being baptized at age eight, and was appreciative of His presence and influence in my life. Furthermore, I was, for the most part, a scrupulous lad in moral matters and religious rites; recalcitrance or rebellion was not really in my nature. To even think of denying any member of The Godhead was anathema to me, and that is precisely why I began to obsess about it. The more repugnant, repellant, and abhorrent the thought or action, the more readily my obsessive mind would seize upon the opportunity to push “replay.” And oh how my mind replayed the obsession! It become akin to a nervous tic, setting up a pattern that would be perpetuated in future strains of OCD related thoughts. Sometimes, albeit usually not in front of other people, I would even make tic-like gestures with my physiology (especially in the area of my head and neck) in an effort to terminate the thought before it could be completed, or better yet,

expunge the thought entirely. Such efforts were predictably futile, even for temporary relief lasting beyond a few seconds, and the thought would continue to replay itself insidiously over and over and over again.

In grave desperation, and naïvely fearing for the welfare of my soul, I finally reached out to my parents to confess the reprehensible and demonically agitating “thoughts” that had been running on repeat through my mind. Lacking the knowledge necessary to discern the symptoms of a diagnosable mental disorder, they mistakenly perceived my plight to be the childlike conundrum of an innocent misunderstanding. As concerned and loving parents, they assured me I was in no danger of becoming a son of perdition because I had not seen God or Jesus face-to-face and thereby gained a full knowledge of them through sentient experience. Mom and Dad were not the slightest bit worried about my spiritual state anyway, but wanting to make sure I better understood the multi-dimensional nature of the doctrine, they provided an understanding of this essential prerequisite—a clarification that helped a great deal in easing my mind on the matter.

In time, I learned even more about the doctrinal truths that disqualified me from realizing this dire, obsessive fear. Doctrinally speaking, to truly become a son of perdition one must have denied “the Holy Spirit after having received it … [and] the Only Begotten of the Father, having crucified him unto themselves and put him to an open shame” in conjunction with “deny[ing] the Son after the Father has revealed him” (italics added).75 In the words of Smith (1971), speaking in April 1844:

What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened to him, and know God, and then … he has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it…. (p. 4 of 6 of virtual printout)

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75 The Doctrine & Covenants 76:35, 43 (1981/2008, p. 139-140).
Clearly, I was not a candidate for perdition. In helping me to this conclusion, my parents had unwittingly provided me with a healthy dose of cognitive therapy. Fortunately, it worked. Like my troubles with the pictures of the burned girl, another strain of obsessive thinking had been put to rest. This was the good news. The bad news was two fold. First, additional strains of obsessive-compulsive neurosis and scrupulosity were right around the corner for me. Second, I was still over four years from receiving a clinical diagnosis for these malevolent manacles of my mind.

**Unwanted Sexual Thoughts**

A typical classification of unwanted thoughts that sufferers of OCD experience involves sexuality and “sexual imagery” (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 457). This is one of the most marked and profound symptoms I faced. The difference between my experience and what could be regarded as the experience of what one might call a “typical teenager” regarding thoughts about sex comes down to the key word: unwanted. While I liked girls (quite a bit, actually, as the next chapter will illustrate) and was therefore naturally curious about female anatomy and heterosexual sexuality, the sexual thoughts I was experiencing did not fit into the category of adolescent sexual desire or curiosity. Rather, they were mostly an involuntary, obsessive response to counsel my Church gave to avoid a “preoccupation with sex in thought, speech, and action.”

Rationally speaking, the operative word in this injunction is, of course, “preoccupation.” Leaders of the Mormon Church know as well as anyone else that it is natural for young people to take in interest in and think sex-related thoughts; nevertheless, with this understanding, they provide

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their members (and particularly teenagers and young adults) with what I believe is wise counsel to avoid a “preoccupation with” the subject in their thought processes. To me, whether we are dealing with sexual thoughts or any other kind of thoughts for that matter, avoiding a “preoccupation with” seems like wise counsel. With my OCD influenced cognitive tendency to see things in “all-or nothing” (Burns, 1980/1999, p. 32) dichotomies, however, I did not clearly understand the difference between “preoccupation with” and individual, passing thoughts on the matter. Convinced that I was sinning by merely having a sexual thought, my obsessive mind (not to be confused with my physical body or sexual organs) began to latch itself lecherously upon thoughts of heterosexual sex. It was a wretchedly burdensome experience. After a few weeks of intense cognitive pain and anguish over the issue, I again went to my parents, and again, they reassured me that I was “okay.” My father, who clearly confused my clinical symptoms with what he viewed as the natural inclinations of a typical teenage boy, was especially reassuring in his efforts to comfort me, and assured me by saying, “Jordan, there isn’t a thought you’ve thought that I haven’t thought a lot more and a lot longer than you have.” Such an outpouring of love, concern, and reassurance from Mom and Dad made all the difference—for about a day. I went to bed feeling like the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders only to wake up the next day and find that my obsessive mind—ever determined to promulgate and then magnify misery in mind, heart, and soul—ever so casually, and with an insidious smirk on its metaphorical face—merely flipped a switch in my head wherein my obsessive thoughts shifted from unwanted heterosexual thoughts to unwanted homosexual thoughts. Agonizing over this new variation on a theme, my suffering continued for literally months until I finally could take
it no more and for the third time went—in tears—to my parents for help and solace. It took much longer this time because of my deep fears that such thoughts meant that maybe I actually did possess authentic tendencies toward homosexuality, and my equally deep fears that my parents might similarly fear and worry about that fact. While verbalizing my inner agonies provided a measure of relief, my parents—and especially my father—were more reserved than they had been before in their spontaneous outpourings of reassurance. While they—and he—were still loving and supportive in the matter, it seemed to me as though they were becoming increasingly perplexed at the unmistakable pattern that was clearly developing with their fifth son and sixth\textsuperscript{77} child. They may have also felt discouraged by an increasing realization of their relative inability to help me.

After this third, dramatic, tear-filled communication, I stopped opening up to my parents on a regular basis about such fears and concerns. First of all, it was difficult—and embarrassing—to disclose the intimate details of my innermost thoughts to others, even my parents. Second, I began to realize that I likely had “miles to go before I\textsuperscript{78} could rest from this malicious mental malaise. Third, I was unaware of the “roots” of my problem, or of the potential of professionals to help me. Fourth, it was also growing increasingly evident that my parent’s capacity to help was limited to the “branches”\textsuperscript{79} of my issue. I therefore began to “hunker down” and “dig in” independently to prepare for what I expected might be a protracted siege as I wended my way through whatever winter remained in the woeful war my mind was so manifestly mired in.

\textsuperscript{77} Sixth of seven children total.
\textsuperscript{78} Robert Frost as reproduced in Kennedy & Gioia (1998, p. 417).
\textsuperscript{79} A play on Thoreau’s (2001) words: “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root,” page 62).
As I soldiered on, the unwanted homosexual thoughts continued, and were added unto by a return of obsessive heterosexual thoughts as well as just about any other kind of sexual cognitions my mind could creatively, and I might add, painfully conjure up. I also experienced what might be termed “natural sexual thoughts” of a heterosexually nature as a result of being a teenage boy who naturally liked and was curious about girls. Such thoughts, however, were usually commandeered by either legitimate efforts to keep them in check as per my religious instruction, or by obsessive, unwanted variations on a theme.

As a result of these obsessive thoughts, I developed several compulsive behaviors aimed at providing relief from the horrifying cognitive symptoms. I choose to share three such examples herein. The first stemmed from a fear I had of laundry. Articles of clothing, especially underwear, became a negative trigger for unwanted sexual thoughts. As a result, if I was ever helping to wash or fold laundry, or if I was going through laundry baskets or piles in an attempt to find an article of my own clothing, I was careful to avoid touching certain clothing articles, or parts of certain articles, specifically those parts designed to cover genital areas and/or breasts in the case of women (my mom and sisters). If I had to touch such an article in order to find something in a pile of laundry, or to fold laundry, or to dress myself, I developed the habit of only touching certain parts of that article (e.g. holding a pair of underwear or bra by the waist band/back strap in order to avoid touching the portions of the article where the genitalia, buttocks, or breast would make actual contact when worn). In my mind’s eye, touching such an article of clothing in the wrong place accompanied by a thought of the actual body part would prove nearly commensurate with touching the actual body part, which would be sinful. Additionally, I developed a quirk for touching such an article with as few fingers as possible (e.g.,
usually my index finger and thumb) in a crustacean-like pincher fashion. Over time, this unusual behavior became difficult to keep from the observations of others in my family. My older sister Jody found my behavior particularly odd and amusing. As a result, she started teasing me, and even assigned me a rather infelicitous nickname: *clipper-boy*, because of the “clipper-like” manner in which I handled laundry. Such teasing was not malicious on my sister’s part; she was merely making a comical assessment of the situation as she myopically viewed it. Nor was it particularly hurtful to me, even at the time. It was mostly just an embarrassing source of feedback that let me know I was at least partially failing in my efforts to keep my obsessive-compulsive behavior a secret from those around me.

The second compulsive behavior involved seating (e.g. chairs, couches, school desks, tables, and anywhere else someone was apt to sit down). When I would come into a room, I would find myself doing an involuntary visual scan to memorize where everyone was sitting. It then became very difficult for me to sit down where other people had previously been sitting because of my mind’s tendency to start thinking obsessive sexual-oriented thoughts about the person who had been sitting there previously. As a result, I developed the compulsion of slouching in my seat or school desk in an exaggerated manner, so that my genitalia would not make contact with the surface of the seat. Of course, I was wearing underwear and pants, so my genitalia would not be touching the seat anyway, but that rational thought was insufficient to prevent obsessive thoughts otherwise. This one obsessive thought alone plagued me for years and accounted for countless hours of mental anxiety. I have often wondered whether any of
my teachers ever noticed my tendency to slouch down so low in my seat. It seemed to me that it must have been somewhat noticeable.

The third compulsion accompanying my sexual obsessions involved altering my manner of giving people hugs as a teenager, especially as a young teenager when the thoughts were still new. Instead of hugging someone full on in typical hugging fashion, I would bend over so that my genitalia area (fully-clothed though it was) would not come in contact with another person's fully clothed genitalia area, or I would turn my body to the side while hugging, or I would leave space between me and the other person and give a weak hug that was more arms and less body. I was sensitive to hugging men because I did not want to fuel homosexual obsessions in any way, and I was sensitive to hugging women because in addition to the genitalia area, there were also the breasts to worry about! I most certainly could not brush fully clothed breasts against my fully clothed chest; that might be sinful, or at least engender sinful (obsessive) thoughts, which would induce the worst part—the unnecessary guilt. Feelings of unnecessary guilt for supposed sins then became as obsessive as the thoughts themselves, except the obsessive guilt was even worse than the obsessive thoughts because of the added emotional and spiritual pain involved. Guilt obsessions attached to many other obsessions covered in later sections as well to the point that pathological guilt became one of the most salient and egregious strains of OCD I would ever face.

Over the years, my tendency toward thinking obsessive sexual thoughts gradually diminished, evolving into other, different obsessions that I will share in coming sections. Thankfully, as a grown adult, and after many years of therapy, such sexual obsessions are mostly extinct for me.
Germs, Blood, and Steroids

One way my unwanted sexual thoughts evolved was by latching on to other thoughts based on generalized fears of unwanted contact with germs and blood. I became an obsessive hand washer (a classical symptom; see DSM-IV TR, 2000, p. 457), although not to the degree of severity that marks some sufferers of OCD.\(^8\) I also became fearful of blood—my own, and that of others. My fear was born out of a dubious association between blood (generally speaking), and the concomitant fear of contracting Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). My irrational fear was that I would somehow pick up the AIDS virus from someone else even though I was not engaging in any behavior that would make me a candidate to contract the disease. Even more nonsensical was my fear that I might somehow contaminate someone else with my own blood, even though my blood was free of any contamination. This fear led to the development of compulsive band-aid wearing, which was exacerbated by the bad habit of picking and picking at the skin around my fingers in a way that caused them to occasionally bleed. It also led to a general avoidance of touching certain objects I feared may have been touched by someone else and somehow picked up some issue of blood on a microscopic scale that might prove to be dangerous. A related strain of this blood fear then developed into another, different fear that I might accidentally ingest anabolic steroids in some speciously arbitrary manner. This strain of thoughts and fears was influenced in large part by my athletic endeavors in high school. A serious cross-country and track athlete, I

\(^8\) I have read about severe-OCD hand washing where a person might wash their hands 50-100, or more, times per day. I never got to this point; however, I would wash my hands a lot more than other teenagers around me (insofar as I could tell). To this day, I remain more obsessed with cleanliness than the typical person (insofar as I have observed), but my symptoms are more indicative of a low-grade, non-clinical case of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) than a case of actual obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).
knew the use of banned substances was against the rules. The operative word here is “rules.” Another of my obsessions, as a later sub-vignette will detail, involved honesty and the scrupulous adherence to rules. Because I was obsessed with keeping certain\textsuperscript{81} rules, my mind would obsessively conjure up ways in which I might “break” the rules inadvertently, some of which, like my fear of capriciously ingesting steroids, was completely irrational. I never used steroids. I did not know of anyone in my community who used—or had access to—steroids. I never had an opportunity to even see, much less ingest, steroids. Moreover, I never had the slightest desire, temptation, or intention to use steroids. Even if I had desired or intended to use steroids, as a proletarian kid from a tiny community in the middle-of-nowhere Utah, USA, at a period of time when the internet was still in its infancy, I had no tangible knowledge about how, where, and from whom I would even be able to acquire such a substance. Furthermore, I’m not even sure that steroids would help a cross-country runner perform better in a three-mile race! It’s not like I was a football player, baseball player, or body builder. Nevertheless, I remained fearful I might somehow ingest them in my body and would therefore be “breaking the rules,” and therefore become a “dishonest person.” My evolving obsessions regarding honesty will be detailed in the next section.

I developed various compulsive behaviors involving when, where, and how I would wash myself, clothe myself, and place personal belongings in an ongoing attempt to “avoid” the calamitous event of accidentally acquiring steroids into my body. These obsessions and compulsions became increasingly severe during my junior cross-country

\textsuperscript{81} I say “certain rules” because I was often inexplicably inconsistent in my decisions about “which” rules to which I would adhere with religious exactness. For example, one of my weaknesses over the years has been my “lead foot” as a driver. While I have often obsessed over speed limits, and felt guilty for speeding, in this particular case, my “need for speed” has usually overpowered my obsession of the rules and/or guilt for breaking them.
season wherein I found a great deal of success as a runner. It seemed as though the more success I found in cross-country (the more races I won), the worse the symptoms became. It was as if the OCD was intent on sabotaging the success (or at least the satisfaction of the success) I was starting to enjoy. I experienced the worst of it in the two weeks leading up to the State race. As I packed for the trip I obsessively stressed about it; as my team drove up to Salt Lake City for the meet I obsessed some more. In the hours leading up to the race itself, the obsession maintained a near chokehold on my mind. In time, this steroidal strain of obsessive thoughts and compulsive acts would eventually die off and/or evolve into other strains, but in the meantime, it was sheer hell to deal with.

These varied obsessive thoughts and their compulsive counterparts were a heavy burden for a young teenager to carry. The following poem captures what it was like to carry this unrelenting burden. It also communicates the hope I had for transcendence through God’s help and Self-Leadership.

Pain’s Glory82

Once upon a night so dreary,
Passing by all weak and weary,
My face cast down, my eyes a’teary,
Grappling firm with fate.

The moonlight pulsates through my heart,
As mind and soul consumes the tart,
And bitter wrenching poignant smart
Of life’s incessant grate.

When shall it end? I plead in tears,
This grating toil that spans the years?
The answer comes: not till all fears,
Are vanquished ’neath my will.

And even then some shall remain,

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82 Reproduced from Jensen (2012, p. 41-42).
For it’s what outlines joy so plain,
The God’s themselves still feel pain,
When humankind choose ill.

There is no other way to feel,
The holy joy that’s just as real
As pain, this paradox reveals,
There is no other way.

Then let us bear with all our might,
The angst and toil amidst life’s plight,
And never ever quit the fight,
Trusting what’s in store.

Though faith and trust don’t erase pain,
They fuel existential gain,
And minus them you’ll ne’er obtain
That sought-for finish line.

Though vict’ry’s blessing starts with you,
It comes down from a Friend that’s true,
Who’s pow’r can lift, build, and renew,
And change your very vision.

Then press on through your preparatory
Stage, then wise, and filled with glory,
You’ll someday guide another’s story,
That’s love’s supremest mission.

– Jordan Jensen

Thoughts of Self-Harm and Harm to Others

Consider the following obsessive thoughts I have had at one time or another:

1). Taking off all of my clothes and running around inappropriately in a public
   setting like church.

2). Making inappropriate sexual advances on someone to whom I am talking.

3). Shouting, screaming, cursing, or inappropriately confessing something terribly
   personal and/or embarrassing in a public setting.
4). Throwing my wallet, keys, or cell phone off a high bridge where I could never retrieve it.

Such examples are not even the worst of it. Consider the following—far more disturbing—cognitions:

5). Hacking my brother up with a hatchet while working alongside him in the garage.

6). Shooting and killing my mother and/or father while out target shooting with my parents.

7). Stabbing my wife while she is cooking in the kitchen.

8). Throwing a baby off a balcony onto the merciless concrete.

9). Driving head-on into an oncoming car, or cranking the steering wheel of my car forcing it into a rollover while driving at or beyond highway speeds.

10). Driving off a guardrail-less road atop a steep mountain cliff.

11). Shoving a friend or loved one off a hiking trail near the edge of a perilously high and rocky precipice where they would certainly meet their death.

12). Placing my hand down on a red hot stove

13). Slamming my face into the steering wheel of my car, or other hard, sharp surface thereby breaking my nose.

Such grisly thoughts are abjectly abhorrent to any human being in their right mind; they are likewise anathema to me. Nevertheless, all of these thoughts, and other unwelcome cognitions like them, have all served as insidious intruders into the pathways of my thought processes at one time or another. Fortunately, such thoughts have rarely taken on the ruminating extremities of OCD that would make them dominant features of
my everyday experiences. Nevertheless, they still arise from time to time and it is always egregiously unpleasant when they do, and until they are gone. Below is an excerpt from my 2006 journal wherein I describe such an episode, which fortunately was relatively rare.

**Monday March 27, 2006**

I have been working steadily toward weaning myself off of my medication. I have, up until today, felt that it is the right time to put my exit strategy into effect. After today I am not so sure because I had an obsessive episode this morning on the way to school that involved an obtrusive thought of giving myself paper cuts in between my fingers. It was a miserable experience and the most powerful episode I have had in at least two months, and only one of two such experiences since I have been in Georgia the past three months.

Because of their incredibly abhorrent nature, such thoughts have the power to literally cause me to feel weak physically, and/or induce momentary physical tics of my head or other body parts. Such terrible experiences have accounted for some of the most temporarily painful cognitions of my overall OCD experience. I thank God that such relatively short-lived obsessive “thought bursts” have not proved as time consuming or repetitive as other strains of OCD I have encountered. I count this as a token of God’s grace, knowing that He knows how difficult such thoughts are to bear, even when they are not long lasting.

**Honesty… the Best Policy?**

Paralleling my unwanted thoughts surrounding sexuality, germs, blood, and steroids was another growing obsession involving scrupulosity that would torment me for many years. It was an obsession surrounding honesty. It included following “the rules” to the letter, and doing “the right thing,” no matter what. This obsession was also triggered and otherwise influenced by my natural inclination to take religious instruction
seriously; however, like the other issues, it was blown way out of proportion once my OCD managed to wrap its venomous tentacles around it. In my myopic quest for utter moral circumspection, I became something of a well-intentioned, postmodern Pharisee, unable in many instances to see the forest for the trees.

A particular event that may have served as a partial trigger of this new and growing obsession occurred in my 9th grade seminary\textsuperscript{83} class, when I was reintroduced to a verse of scripture that I had read over several times in my life, but had never struck me with as much fervor as it did that day. The verse read, “Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.”\textsuperscript{84}

I had always been an inherently honest person. From my earliest memories, I had been taught to be honest by my parents, siblings, and church. At the age of four or so, I had innocently pocketed some candies from the grocery store. When my parents found out about the pilfered goods, they made me return to the store and make restitution for my petty burglary. It was a lesson not lost on me; I never stole candy—or anything else—again, including downloadable music or movies later in life. Aside from these external influences, it was not in my nature to lie, cheat, or steal. Nevertheless, like most (if not all) other human beings, I cannot claim absolute perfection in the matter. After reading that scripture, my already inherently honest nature was seized upon by an obsessive barrage of self-inflicted self-policing that began to take the honesty edict to a whole new level of conscientiousness, if not, at times, absurdity.

\textsuperscript{83} In \textit{The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints}, adolescents attend four years of seminary. This involves spending approximately one hour each school day (either before school or during [as a “release time” period] being instructed in and studying the “Standard Works” (official scriptural canon) of the Church. One year is spent on the \textit{Old Testament}; one year is spent on the \textit{New Testament}; one year is spent on \textit{The Book of Mormon}, and one year is spent on \textit{The Doctrine & Covenants} and \textit{The Pearl of Great Price} together. Thus, by the time one graduates from high school, one may also graduate from seminary having completed four years of formal, religious instruction.

The same fall I had been introduced to the scripture about liars going to hell, I procured a license to go mule deer hunting. One day, I was up on my Dad’s land hunting with my late cousin Ryan. As we took turns shooting at deer within the sights of our rifles, a pickup truck came rolling along the dusty dirt road where we had been firing. When it arrived where we stood, a man got out of the truck and confronted us about where we had been shooting. As it happened, his home (and family) was not far from where we were and he was understandably concerned about where we had been aiming our rifles. He asked me if we had been shooting in the direction of his house. Nervously, my mind replayed the shots we had taken toward the west, and I quickly blurted out that we had not taken shots toward the east—in the direction of his home. Almost as soon as I said it, and upon further recollection of all the shots we had taken so far that afternoon, I realized that we actually had taken a few shots to the east. When I realized the half-truth I had inadvertently told under the pressure of this unexpected confrontation, I began to feel a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. Too afraid to admit my partial deception after this inner realization, the man parted ways with us after adding a word or two in promotion of safe hunting practices.

As we climbed on the all-terrain vehicle that carried us home, I was beside myself knowing I had not been completely honest with the man. For the better part of the next year, I might as well have gone to hell because of the mental hell I suffered through over this one accidental mistruth. I replayed the incident and reflected on it over and over and over again in my mind. As I did, the guilt, fear, and agony I suffered reached proportions of poignant extremity. I contemplated many times going back to the man’s house to confess my lie, but my fear of doing so was as great as my agony in not doing so. Every
time I would drive by his home, and on countless other occasions, the obsession, and concomitant vacillations, would return, and my mind could find no peace. In fact, it was common for the worried thoughts to swoop down upon me in their greatest earnestness at the very moments when I was feeling happiness or peace. For example, one night, as I lay in bed thinking about my future as a competitive runner, my heart and mind were filled with a spontaneous, joyful anticipation of the future. It felt wonderful. In the midst of this joyful experience, I was reminded of the partial mistruth I inadvertently told this man during deer season, and that was the end of my joy for the evening. This pattern of painful, obsessive thoughts seizing upon thoughts of peace, joy, or contentment would continue throughout every strain of OCD I would experience in the future. More will be said on the subject in a later section.

Finally, after about nine months had gone by, I could take it no more. Mustering up all the courage I could collect in my mind, heart, and being, and praying for strength, I returned to the man’s house one Sunday afternoon after church, knocked on his door, confessed my error, apologized, and then drove home having finally relinquished one of the most obdurate burdens I had ever carried. I had repented of my sin, and could finally find peace. The man was not angry; if anything, I suppose he admired my courage; and perhaps wondered at what deep and compelling force had tormented me to the extent that I felt so impelled to confess this inadvertent *white lie* so long after the fact. I felt better after confessing, and was finally able to put the matter to rest.

This act, while perhaps morally noble on one hand, reeked of obsessive-compulsivity on the other hand. It played right into the insidious cycle of “obsession – compulsion – temporary relief” which was destined to play itself out in a manner that
would ultimately prove unsustainable. While confessing my accidental *white lie* brought my conscience peace on this one *specific* matter, it proved only a grandiose beginning of a *general* strain of OCD that would plague my mind and heart for years to come in regards to anything that might have anything to do with what I *supposed* was meant by “complete honesty.”

The deeper I plunged into this new strain of obsessive thinking, the more closely I watched and then self-analyzed every word and deed, deconstructing the same with the utmost circumspection, precision, and magnification. In my mind, the slightest deviation from the *absolute* truth, regardless of the situation, was not to be tolerated. The problem with this, of course, is that 100 percent completely honest communication in every nuanced, syntactical particular is not only unrealistic, but unwise as well. No matter how well intentioned a person might be in regards to truth-telling, there are so many flaws in human communication that holding oneself to the standard of absolute honesty in every last word was, as I discovered, a pathway to a self-sustaining neurosis and a dysfunctional sociality.

There is a difference between intentionally misleading someone and accidentally neglecting to mention every single minor detail of every situation or issue. For example, if a supervisor asked a subordinate for a report on an incident regarding a certain colleague, and the subordinate accidentally forgot to mention a few minor details of the incident, it doesn’t mean he or she must run back to their supervisor every time they recall another minor detail unmentioned the first time. In most cases, doing so would not only be unnecessary, but probably quite irritating to the supervisor as well.
There is also a difference between purposely deceiving someone and purposely neglecting a given detail out of a prudent and measured concern for that person’s welfare or feelings. For example, if you are visiting someone’s home, and they ask you what you think of their interior décor, would it be dishonest to say “not too bad,” even though you honestly think it’s rather tacky? If so, would it be morally imperative to retract your original comment and tell your host or hostess what you really think of their poor taste in interior decoration? Or, if a five-year old overhears the word “rape” on the news their mother or father is watching, and queries the parent on the meaning of the word, would it be in the child’s best interest to honestly provide a wholly accurate definition of such an adult term?

The answers to these questions are sufficiently self-evident to require no further discussion among reasonable persons in adequate possession of humane sensibilities. The problem I faced as a teenager, and even as a young adult, however, was an ongoing inability to perceive lucid answers to such seeming “moral dilemmas.” My obsession surrounding honesty thus created a deeply rooted cognitive distortion that led me to believe that any mistruth, regardless of the situation or intentions at hand, was at least potentially sinful, and should be avoided at nearly all costs. When I would fall short of this unfeasible standard, the compulsive need to repent through confession and apology would be my only sure pathway to peace, and even then such peace was short-lived and destined to repeat in the near future as part of the insidious OCD-cycle of “obsession-compulsion-relief” concerning another matter, which was sure to be engaged very soon thereafter.
This strain of OCD also created many awkward social situations, where my compulsive confessions and apologies sometimes did more harm than they did good, and were certainly cause for wonder and confusion among the recipients of my practice of penitence over such petty matters, which, in many cases, mattered only to me and my own obsessive mind.

A related strain of obsessive thoughts evolved out of this penchant for absolute honestly: the fear of offending others. I would go to great lengths not only to avoid offense, but also to confess and apologize to the person I had offended (or thought I had offended).

As a means of mollifying the intense guilt, fear, and anxiety that proved persistent and consistent symptoms of my obsessive-compulsive behaviors in this and other strains, I became addicted to the “reassurances” that real (or perceived) authority figures could grant my afflicted mind. The same kind of loving reassurances I had received from my parents when I first went to them over my initial episodes with the disorder were sought for again and again from a variety of sources. These sources included individuals I believed I had offended in specific situations. They also included parents, teachers, ecclesiastical leaders, and other figures I deemed authoritative enough to externally grant me clemency and absolution for real (or perceived) mistruths or misdeeds. The next four sub-vignettes provide additional, concrete examples of my obsessive scrupulosity with honesty.

**Veering off course at the state meet.**

At the State cross-country race my junior year in high school, with about 600 yards left in the race, I suddenly became confused about whether to veer right or left at a
certain point on the course. Since I was in first place, I could not merely “follow the guy in front of me.” For a few strides, I started veering left. Soon thereafter, I realized that I was supposed to stay to the right. I quickly discovered my error and veered back to the right. The error had likely involved less than 50 meters, and even then, it probably had subtracted virtually no distance from the race I had run. In fact, if anything it had added additional distance to my race. Nevertheless, in my mind, I had wrongfully left the appointed course, and to my knowledge, no referee or “judge” was there to determine the potential legality or illegality of my few confused steps. Although my slight deviation lasted only a few seconds, it was (in my mind) enough of a misstep to plant a seed of pathological doubt concerning whether or not I had “honestly” completed—and won—the race in an approved manner. For months after being declared the “State Champion,” I stressed about this slight error, wondering whether or not I really deserved to be the State Champion. In my myopic mindset, my momentarily deviation from the course must technically be “against the rules.” Perhaps I had inadvertently “cut the course,” and should turn myself in. No matter that whatever race judges had ultimately declared my race legally and accurately run; perhaps they made a mistake, and they probably didn’t see me at that moment in the course. No matter that I had beaten second place by 17 seconds, and my error probably subtracted virtually no time from my race. Perhaps disqualification was still what I really deserved. The greatest irony of this situation is that upon further logical reflection in the intervening years, I have come to the realization that if anything, I had actually covered a few more meters than a few too few because of my slight miss step. My error caused me to make a correction that almost certainly added distance to my race; it did not take away from it. Nevertheless, in the years before I was
able to finally see this through the lens of logic, rationality, and accuracy, some of the joy of this cherished achievement was tarnished in my own mind. I even thought many times that perhaps I should call the Utah High School Athletics Association (UHSAA) and confess in hopes of gaining reassurance. Fortunately, the irrationality of such a move was—even to myself at the time—sufficiently strong to prevent such a move.

Sales tax refunds.

In between my junior and senior years of high school, I joined my brother’s sales team and began peddling Cutco Cutlery in my hometown of Monticello, Utah, and surrounding environs. I had once heard my Uncle Hyrum say that people do not try sales, sales tries people, and it chews up and spits out 95 percent of those it tries. It did not take me too long to figure out that I was going to be one of the 95 percent, even though it took a while for me to fully accept this disappointing reality. Despite my great failure as a direct salesman, I had garnered several sales that summer. Later in the summer as I was reviewing some of the orders I had closed, I discovered, I had accidentally charged my customers the wrong sales tax percentage on their orders by a trivial, fractional amount. My slight error (or perceived error, as I never had unequivocal verification from the company that I had indeed made an error that needed correcting) caused me much obsessive worry and concern. I was about to go on my LDS mission, and would soon have to pass two worthiness interviews with ecclesiastical leaders. Could I honestly say that I was honest in my dealings with my fellowman if I did not do something to remedy this error/perceived error? After much stewing over the issue, I finally relented to a compulsive action in an attempt to find relief. I went back through all the duplicate

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85 One of the standard questions in an LDS worthiness interview.
copies of orders I had processed and mathematically calculated (and then double or triple checked) precisely how much excess sales tax I had inadvertently charged each of my customers. By the numbers, my error (or perceived error) had been so slight as to amount to a matter of literally a few pennies or other small denominational coins in most instances. The largest order of the summer (over $1,000) amounted to less than three dollars. Nevertheless, I totaled it all up and then sent refunds to every single customer (approximately 15-20) in the mail with a letter containing the possibly misappropriated (albeit extraordinarily paltry) funds, and explaining my mistake in detail. Looking back, I can only imagine how surprised someone must have been to open up my letter and find a nickel and a few pennies, or a dime, or a quarter, or at most a dollar or two. They must have scratched their head a bit at the oddity of my action, and wondered how I justified sending refunds that were less than the stamp it cost to send it. To this day, I never heard anything from the company about my need to take such an action. Chances are good that the home office fixed those kinds of errors in-house if necessary anyway, but unsure of the “truth” of the matter, I opted to err on the side of covering every possible base. I would not sleep well at night, nor find peace during the day, with the knowledge that I might not have been 100% fair-and-square with my customers. Honorable? In one sense, yes; but it was clearly obsessive on another, reasonable and realistic level.

**Paying “back” taxes.**

I did not make a lot of money at many of my part-time jobs in high school, and my employers did not take out taxes from my paychecks. The assumption was that I was not being paid enough to even qualify for paying taxes. Nevertheless, I worried about this a lot over the years, to the point that in 2003, I hired an accountant to help me file
back taxes for several years of work in high school. I collected all of my income records, and filed taxes for 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001, and 2002. My entire tax obligation for all those years (including interest and late payments, which was a substantial portion of what I owed) was only about $1,500, but my conscience simply would not rest until I had been fully honest with the IRS even though I was quite confident they would have probably never come after me for those years where my income was so paltry. In order to afford the payments, I had to persuade my oldest brother to co-sign with me on a bank loan that took me over two years to pay off. I do not regret my decision to do this. If I had to do it again, even as far as I have come with my OCD, I would probably still pursue this same course because circumspect honesty really is that important to me, and I have kept up with both my personal and business taxes since that time. Nevertheless, I share this vignette as an example of how I probably worried and obsessed far more than most other people in my situation may have done.

**Poor academic results.**

In the previous chapter, I included scanned copies of report cards from my elementary, junior high, and high school years to illustrate the way in which OCD played a role in my falling grades in high school. This section details the ways in which OCD influenced that trend.

As mentioned earlier, I exhibited a propensity for academic achievement early on in my educational journey. In elementary school, I got almost exclusively As and Bs, but mostly As. Once in a family Christmas letter, my Dad wrote to family and friends: “Jordan is a real academic superstar.” I never forgot those words of my father, and felt great pride in them. My older brothers were usually way-above average students who
were, for the most part, self-disciplined and academically gifted. As such, I naturally formulated great academic ambitions, believing I would someday surpass all my brothers’ academic achievements.

In seventh grade, as OCD began to really take hold of my life, things began to change. I suppose there are not many people anywhere who would speak fondly about their seventh grade school year; nevertheless, mine was particularly hellish because of my recent immersion in a sea of insalubrious neurosis. It was one of the worst years of my life both socially and emotionally. The innocent existence I had thrived in as a popular kingpin of my elementary entourage was utterly obliterated and replaced by a junior high jungle of juvenile jejunity. The typical plight of a plebian seventh grader was exacerbated many times over by my intense OCD symptoms. Moreover, in light of my growing obsessions regarding honesty, morality, and all-around circumspect human behavior, junior high seemed to me like a concentrated concatenation of diabolical debauchery. I was horrified at the language I heard in hallways and classrooms. I was mortified at the way some of my peers referenced sexuality and/or had already became sexually involved, or at least talked as if they had. One day in English class, a friend of mine repeated something a girl sitting next to him—who appeared stoned—had revealed. According to my friend, this girl told him: “I F----d four different guys last night.” To me she looked the part of the adolescent whore: attractive in a sexy, sleazy sort of way; and she appeared to be high, hung-over, totally exhausted, or perhaps a combination of the three. Was this real life? Such an incident retold, whether the girl was telling the truth or not, was horrifying to me. While nothing particularly bad happened to me in seventh grade aside from some minor bullying, the intensity of the external stimuli of
what was going on around me (and what I worried might be going on around me) set up a relentless barrage of triggers to my growing list of OCD symptoms. As a result, I learned to despise the time I spent in school. I loved to be home; I hated to be at school. Peace would fill my heart when I’d set off on my bike for my house after school each day, and especially on Friday afternoons or preceding holidays, spring break, or Christmas vacation. Returning each day, and especially on Mondays, became a dreaded chore. I often engaged in attempts to persuade my Mom to come check me out of school for a few class periods on Fridays so we could go to lunch or the mall together. One time, my sister even checked me out for a similar purpose. In hindsight, I’m not even sure if that was allowed, but thankfully, that minor indiscretion never registered in my mind as a legitimate cause to feel guilty, and my sister Jody certainly wasn’t concerned bout it. I guess the escape from school outweighed other potential concerns. I also had not fully developed my “rules” obsession yet.

The more I suffered from obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior, the less I cared about my grades. While I still got good grades (no A’s and B’s) my seventh grade year, my erstwhile ambitions for A’s that I’d felt as an elementary school student began to evaporate.

At the conclusion of seventh grade, my family moved from Mesa, Arizona to Monticello, Utah. This was a significant change for me on several levels. In terms of dealing with my OCD, it turned out to be an enormous blessing. Mesa was a major suburb of one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States at the time, and still is nearly 20 years later (Phoenix, AZ). Monticello was a town of about 2,000 residents in the middle of nowhere, Utah, whose population has remained relatively static
for decades. In Monticello, we were four-to-five hours away from the nearest major cities (Albuquerque, NM, and Salt Lake City, UT), and other large city centers (Phoenix, Las Vegas, Reno, and Denver—the next closest big cities) were all seven or more hours away. After being enrolled in a major suburban junior high with 1,600 students where I would have eventually gone on to a high school with approximately 3,000 students, I was now in a high school with about 400 students in grades seven (7) through twelve (12). My entire eighth grade class consisted of only about 50-60 of my peers. My graduating class in Mesa would have been nearly 1,000. The move to Monticello provided a welcomed return to vestiges of the atmosphere of innocence I had enjoyed as an elementary school student in Mesa. This did much to provide relief from the agonies I had suffered in seventh grade; however, it did not eradicate them. Aside from dealing with bullies, my OCD continued to evolve and pose a major personal problem for me as I strove to meet my adolescent academic and other obligations.

In elementary, I was a superstar at basic arithmetic, and was consistently among the best in my classes at timed tests for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. To this day, I consider myself above average at basic figuring in my head as well as retaining the times tables in my long-term memory. In fifth grade, however, my math performance began to slip as the course material began including more advanced mathematical concepts. By seventh grade, I had gone from mathematical superstar to entirely average, and was placed into a basic seventh grade math class. As an eighth grader in Monticello, no one knew of my former struggles, nor did they have any test scores on record for me from my Mesa years. As such, I was given the choice of which math class I would take. Still harboring naïve childhood dreams of mathematical
greatness, I thumbed my nose at common sense and audaciously enrolled in algebra one. No matter I had yet to take pre-algebra. Algebra one was above average for eighth graders, and that would ensure I could eventually take calculus before I graduated. This was my big chance to get back on par with my childhood academic dreams. When I entered the algebra one classroom that warm August day, I would not have imagined it would be nearly three years later before I would finally leave it. I got straight C’s and D’s the first and second years I took it. The third year I took it for the final three quarters and managed to improve my grades to as high as an A-minus, but after twelve quarters of algebra one, I never did get an A. Years later when I was dating the woman who would eventually become my wife, I asked her: “what was your favorite subject in high school?” Her reply? “Algebra one.” I thought: “Wow, have I found the girl for me! If we can get this thing to work out between us, our kids would have a genetic chance in math, and I would be forever exonerated from helping them with their algebra homework!”

As this story implicates, my slipping grades in high school were not entirely a result of my OCD. One reason was a natural difficulty I discovered with math and science at the high school level. Another reason was that my interest in athletics superseded my interest in academics in high school. A final reason is that sometimes I was just simply lazy. I did not much like the work my teachers assigned me to do, and too often I made the short sighted and undisciplined decision simply not to do it.

Where OCD did impact my scholastic performance was through my honesty obsession. When it came to my schoolwork, I began to take honesty to a whole new level, an unnecessary level that was way beyond even what teachers and administrators
expected. For example, when I would receive an assignment, I would assess what I perceived were the necessary standards required to complete the assignment honestly. These standards were largely self-imposed and went beyond what the teacher required. Such standards set up various requirements (compulsions) to *properly* compete an assignment with my integrity in tact. Because of the extra mental stress and physical effort required to adhere to my own self-imposed “rules,” I would sometimes neglect to finish and turn in an assignment because to do so “properly” was not worth the effort it required. It was easier emotionally and spiritually to just *not* do the assignment and take the zero. It was much less stressful for me to get a zero on an assignment than it was to feel I had somehow cheated the assignment and earn points dishonestly.

A concrete example of this bizarre phenomenon occurred my sophomore year in high school. I had enrolled in an Advanced Placement (A.P.) American history course. I was the only sophomore in a class of juniors and seniors (history was one of my best subjects even though my grades did not support this fact). One day, we were instructed to write an essay. I had not done the reading for the assignment and decided to just do my best on the essay using background knowledge and common sense. I did not consult anyone else and did all the work myself. When I got the paper back, I was pleased to see that I had scored a 92-percent to get an A-grade on the paper. This self-satisfaction was soon replaced by an even more poignant emotion: guilt. I was convinced I had not earned the points in an honest manner. In my mind, perfect honesty required adequate reading, studying, and pondering on the topic, all preceding my efforts to then write the essay. Merely getting the right answers would not cut it for me; I needed to pay the price to acquire the knowledge that *should* precipitate effectively articulating the right answers
in a well-thought out essay; merely guessing was tantamount to cheating. To make
matters worse, this paper was one of the last assignments and grades of the semester.
Considering I received a D-plus grade\textsuperscript{86} for the fourth and final quarter, I reasoned that it
was altogether possible that my ‘A’ grade on that last essay was perhaps the only points
keeping me from failing the class. I then reasoned that had I gotten the grade I really
deserved on that paper, I would maybe have gotten an F-grade rather than a D-plus grade.
If I should have gotten an F-grade, then I would become ineligible to run cross-country
the following quarter of my junior year.\textsuperscript{87} That summer, I replayed this theoretical
grading points scenario over and over in my mind. I worried about it; I stewed over it; I
felt guilty about it. What to do? Having already established a pattern of eventually going
to confess and apologize for whatever was obsessively chafing at my conscience, I finally
gave in a few days after school started my junior year. I actually went to talk to my A.P.
American history teacher. Even at the time, there was a part of me that questioned the
perceived necessity in doing so. I recognized she might think I was a little bit crazy.
After all, who worries about things like this? I understood rationally that my behavior
was greatly removed from that of students who attempted to blatantly cheat, and was
within the realms of what other, upstanding, and honest students would do without
thinking twice about it. Not wanting to appear a fool, or worse, a crazy fool, I was
guarded and stealthy in approaching my former teacher about my concern. I do not even
remember exactly what I said, but whatever she said, I was able to walk out with

\textsuperscript{86} I remember a girl in my class who got an A-grade that final quarter that I received my D-plus grade. Ironically, when we took the A.P. test at the end of the year, I scored a four (out of five) and she only scored a three (out of five). This was one of many examples of how my grades were rarely commensurate with my academic potential in high school.

\textsuperscript{87} The quarter where I ended up winning the State Championship race.
sufficient reassurance to go on my merry way and not let the issue cause me to doubt my legitimate eligibility any longer.

A related experience involved the classroom attendance roll. Punctuality was not my greatest strength in high school. This was especially true for the first period of the day as well as the first period after lunchtime. Not much inclined to socialize before school or during lunch, I would habitually stay at home as long as I possibly could before leaving to school in the morning, and if I went home for lunch, I practiced the same habit after lunch was over. Many were the occasions when I would hop on my bike (or later into my jeep) and make a mad, furious rush from my home to my classroom, covering the half-mile distance (from door-to-door) in under two minutes time. As a result of this habit, I was not uncommonly tardy. This was okay with me as long as the teacher made sure to mark me tardy on the attendance sheet. If the teacher would forget, I would feel compelled to go and remind them that I had been tardy to class that day. Occasionally, the attendance sheet would make it to the office before I could request the change. On more than one such occasion, I guiltily went down personally to the office to ask that the appropriate change be made. Fortunately, my first period class attendance was done by students, and not the teacher, so it was easy to secure the roll and make sure I marked myself tardy when arriving after the bell.

**Prompts from “God”**

I wish to preface this section by saying that I believe not only that God exists, but that God can speak to His children (including me) in a variety of ways. Such communications can come through mental and/or visceral-based thoughts and/or feelings. This section is not about authentic communication from God. Rather, I speak of the
ROCD-influenced faux communication I often misinterpreted as real messages from God. There is an enormous difference between the two.

My senior year of high school in Spokane afforded me greater academic opportunities than were available in Monticello. Among these options was Advanced Placement (A.P) European History, a class in which I wisely chose to enroll. After being in the class for a few days, however, I began to feel strong inner promptings that I should not be in the class. Growing up, I was taught that God’s Holy Spirit could communicate with our Spirits and thereby direct us in our daily walk. I had great faith in this concept as a religious principle, in part because of my mother’s example. The problem was that my mother’s interpretation of the doctrine sometimes led her to make decisions that, in hindsight, and in my own opinion, seemed more like superstitious obsessions than authentic communications from God. Nevertheless, I had a very close relationship with my Mother, and was still at an impressionable age. The combination of this fact and an increasingly entrenched strain of OCD that was polluting the doctrine turned into a treacherous cognitive-emotional toxicant for me. As OCD took hold of this part of my life, I began receiving an unusual quantity of “spiritual promptings” in all sorts of everyday situations. These “promptings” ranged from the supposedly spiritual to the ridiculously random, and everything in between. As a result, my mind began conjuring up all sorts of “promptings” cloaked in the pseudo-robes of religious enjoinment. Aside from producing poignant and wild-eyed anxiety, I grew circuitously confused between the difference between legitimate promptings from a Godly source encouraging me to perform good deeds and/or avoid danger and the reverberating ruminations of the capricious concoctions my mind so colorfully dressed up as directions from Deity.

88 ROCD refers to “OCD related to religious content” (Himle, Chatters, Taylor, and Nguyen, 2011, p. 242).
As I struggled with this unrelenting triadic ambivalence between mind, heart, and spirit, I sometimes made decisions I now regret, and that I would almost certainly do differently if I could travel into the past and have a do-over. While these actions were well intentioned, they were ultimately compulsions aimed at providing relief to their obsessive counterparts, even though, at the time, I mistakenly thought I was doing God’s will. Any relief I was able to access through action was always temporary, surviving only until the next “prompting” triggered a new obsessive thought along with its concomitant anxiety and compulsive counterparts. Such actions, while they would usually provide temporary relief to me personally, had a deleterious effect to my social life, confidence, and generally motivated me to avoid many social situations and opportunities enjoyed my peers, those “normal teenagers” I sometimes envied for their apparent mental hygiene and seeming social ease, which I so desperately lacked.

One such “prompting”-influenced decision I would most likely change if I could have a redo would be to not drop A.P. European history. Once out of the class, I had to fill the hole in my schedule with a new course. I chose regular 11th grade American history. Talk about a completely illogical move! I had already passed the A.P. American history course and exam as a sophomore. Now I was a senior enrolling in regular 11th grade U.S. History? No matter that it defied common sense and logic; I had received a “prompting,” so in my mind, I had to obey it, for it was not a matter of what I wanted, it was a matter of God’s will (or so I thought at the time), and that meant that (in my mind) my eternal salvation hinged at least in part on obedience to the prompting, and others like it. In hindsight, I was almost as bad as a radical Islamic extremist jihadist. Fortunately, my “promptings” involved relatively insignificant matters and did not involve injuring or

This particular strain of OCD afflicted me for well over a decade.
killing other people! Instead of being in A.P European history where I could have really stretched my budding intellectual capacities as a writer, thinker, and historian, I suffered through the tedious lectures of one of the driest, monotonic, and insipidly opaque courses I have ever taken. The class’s instructor was as bad as his course was, and looking back, I do not know that I have met many pedagogues, before or since, who stood in front of a classroom so utterly bereft of vitality, personality, and passion as was that sorry excuse of an educator. I love American history, yet bearing through that class was, pardon the hyperbole, almost as painful as my OCD was, and it was exacerbated by a couple of jejune juniors who seemed to pride themselves on their prolific pontifications of puerile profanity. Their lewd and crass conversations were consistently carried out clandestinely so the utterly clueless el professor would remain in the dark. Swearing was another thing I was taught not to do, and this daily dosage of obscenities induced enormous anxiety and deep resentment toward the perverse purveyors thereof. Compulsively compelled to do something about it, I made a comment or two in their general direction about how I felt about their foul verbal fusillades. My preaching and snide comments, not surprisingly made things worse, and from that point on, their classless communications were peppered with cruel barbs aimed at singling me out for persecution. Nevertheless, not destined to be a doormat, I considered my options for recourse. First, I went to my ace teacher; you can imagine how much good that did. Next, I allowed myself to respond as many a misguided crusader has so vociferously, yet foolishly done; I spontaneously made an impromptu and uninvited speech in front of the entire room right in the middle of class. This outburst was prompted by a combination of natural anger and frustration that had been building for weeks and months in concert with my ever present and superstitiously
religious penchant for taking compulsive action aimed at “doing battle with evil” even if my battle plans were fool hardy, unrehearsed, and unconcerned with their attendant social fallout (as if things were good in the first place). Nevertheless, in the heat of the moment, I was ready to do battle, and do battle I did! Rising dramatically to my feet next to my desk and turning around so all could observe my speech, I summitted my soapbox with a searing salvo at my throat and ready for launch. Pulling the trigger, I proceeded to publicly upbraid my two offending foes for their disgusting discourse. I also made an appeal to the rest of the class wherein I questioned their own collective acceptance of such pathetic parlance and puerile patois. I was secretly hoping I might garner some disciples who would rally behind my verbal assault and follow me gloriously on as I charged the hill in a near suicidal frontal assault. Perhaps there would at least be a few heads nodding in agreement with me. To my chagrin, none of these hopes materialized. Instead, there was silence—and shock. When at last I concluded my impromptu diatribe, you could have heard a pin drop, and I’m not sure I have ever seen a classroom of students so speechless, or a more baffled teacher at the front of the room. With an evident lack of recruits lining up behind the banner I had so boldly waved before my fellow classmates, and with nothing else to say, I proceeded to pick up my backpack and strode to the far side of the classroom with a boldness, audacity, and humiliation that was as pronounced and noble as it was pathetic. Locating an unoccupied seat on the far side of the room next to the window, I independently annexed a new seat where I would sit for the remainder of the semester. No one, including the teacher, tried to stop me, nor did anyone, including the teacher, have any problem with my change of seats, which I fortunately maintained for the remaining painful month or so of the class before the
semester gratefully came to a close and I could enroll in a different class. To my gratification, there was a girl in the class who was in another of my classes who came up to me later to express her agreement with and support of what I had said about the swearing. Later, I ended up asking that girl out; she stood me up. Following my soapbox speech, I made one additional effort to address the swearing and harassment I had endured in that class. I attended an after school faculty meeting whereby I was given an opportunity to explain the nature of my situation and voice my grievance in the matter. To my satisfaction, one of the assistant principles, an old-school disciplinarian who resembled a white-haired Dick Van Dyke, openly offered his support. He was taken aback that such a thing had even occurred and voiced some strong words in opposition of it. I do not remember precisely what he said he was going to do about it, and I knew at the time that his power was likely to be limited in what he could realistically do about it. I nevertheless felt a degree of vindication and satisfaction at having made the added effort.

These are just a couple of many examples I could tell of the obsessive-compulsive influenced stress I suffered through as a result of quasi and/or pseudo spiritual promptings. While my heart was always in the right place, I was often gravely naïve and misguided in my approach. Instead of thinking dilemmas through with the kind of broad minded logic, reason, and confidence that might have empowered me to respond in ways that could have upheld my character while avoiding the alienation of other people, I usually opted for an OCD-driven, narrow-minded approach that was metaphorically tantamount to charging the high ground with insufficient numbers, and without armor,

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90 While I was no stranger to romantic rejection, as a later vignette will detail, this was the only time in my life where I was literally stood up for a formally scheduled date.

91 Or maybe it was my guidance counselor; I can’t remember which.
artillery cover, or aerial support. As military history has amply evinced, that approach typically fails quite miserably.

The intensity of my OCD had managed to subvert, at least to an extent, one of the most powerful influences in the world of teenagers, or of people in general: a sense of social embarrassment and shame. For me, a clear conscience was usually far more valuable than what my peers thought of me. In principle, I believe this was fundamentally a wise and mature outlook. The problem was that I lacked the knowledge, talent, courteousness, self-awareness, and social savvy to navigate this precarious dichotomy with the kind of confidence and class that ultimately wins friends and influences people. You might say that I was trapped in a sort of neurotic, social-moral catch-22.

This strain of ROCD,\(^{92}\) wherein I confused real promptings from a Higher Power with the obsessive thought-based impulses of my own mind, produced some of the most severe symptoms of my entire experience with OCD. It was also one of the more difficult strains to learn how to effectively manage.

**Conternated Underneath\(^{93}\)**

Conternated underneath
A soul that’s ever burdened,
With all I am,
And all I’m not,
And all I want to be!

O please dear God do not forsake
My ever anxious mind,
Be always near me
Is my prayer,
And peace help me to find.

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\(^{92}\) ROCD refers to “OCD related to religious content” (Himle, Chatters, Taylor, and Nguyen, 2011, p. 242).

\(^{93}\) Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 43-44).
And yet, I seek not ever for
A terminus to trials,
My greatest friend
They tend to be
I should welcome life’s wiles.

Yes give me full exposure to what
Will make me like thee,
For that dear God’s
My fondest wish:
Thy own dear Face to see.

– Jordan Jensen

Weight of the World on My Shoulders

As I struggled with OCD, I eventually fell prey to all ten of Burns’ (1999) cognitive distortions. These distortions are:

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking
2. Overgeneralization
3. Mental Filter
4. Disqualifying the Positive
5. Jumping to Conclusions
6. Magnification and Minimization
7. Emotional Reasoning
8. Should Statements
9. Labeling and Mislabeling
10. Personalization (p. 32-43)

The combination of all these distortions working obsessively together placed an unrealistic moral imperative on my shoulders that was basically commensurate with perfectionism, at least as I viewed perfectionism. It essentially involved an obsession of maintaining a spot-free conscience at all times. In theory, I do not view such a quest negatively. Indeed, generally speaking, I think everyone could benefit from striving to live with a clearer conscience. The problem was that my cognitive distortions created “sins” that were usually not really “sins” at all. These same distortions also instilled in
me a sense of responsibility for others that was not only spiritually, religiously, existentially, and deontologically hyperbolic, but that practically speaking was totally unrealistic—and often presumptuous (getting me entangled inappropriately in other people’s business) as well. The sum result of this madness was to turn me into a rather pathetic Atlas archetype, burdened by the self-imposed responsibility for perfection not only in my own conduct, but also for the moral actions and needs of other people—and not just one or two persons, but essentially the entire Planet, or at least the minute population of the Planet with which I had immediate contact and purview. It was an utterly infeasible task, and one that placed an indescribably ponderous burden upon my head and mind, heart, shoulders, back, limbs, hands, feet, viscera, and spirit. This obsessive sense of faux responsibility traveled with me everywhere I went, and obnoxiously stuck its obtrusive head into virtually every situation in which I found myself. It also conjured up many a situation and circumstance that did not even exist, but that had been created in my own mind and heart and thereby exerted a sense of almost panicked-urgency to taking action in situations that did not require any action, and for which, in some cases, actually did more harm than good. In the process, I annoyed—and probably bewildered—many a family member, friend, acquaintance, and even stranger. To this day, I still shudder when I recall some of the ridiculous things I either said or did in my continual attempts to fulfill such unrealistic and unnecessary expectations I imposed on myself as a result of an extraordinarily exaggerated conception of what God expected of me. Moreover, such an anxious and discontented spirit made it quite difficult to develop normal, functioning, and mutually satisfying friendships or relationships with my peers.
Amazingly, I managed to hold myself hostage to vestiges of these self-imposed and uncannily high standards for an ungodly number of years. How my head kept from exploding—or from experiencing a nervous breakdown or something akin thereto—through it all is a wonder to me. Indeed, I often felt as though I was tottering atop a sky-reaching and narrow precipice of mental hygiene with the winds of OCD raging all around me in a continual attempt to whisk me off the cliff and down, down into a vacuous stupor of insanity. Fortunately, I was always able so somehow hold my ground, which may have made the entire journey that much more difficult, for there were times when insanity might have proved a welcome reprieve.

It was not until I began serious psychotherapy after my mission until I finally started to relinquish this unrelentingly egregious burden. Even then, my achievement of mental hygiene in the matter was accomplished only slowly by degrees, and over a long period of time. In the intervening years, and through much cognitive-behavioral treatment (professional, homespun, and self-help oriented) I have become increasingly skilled at recognizing what I actually am responsible for, and what I am not responsible for. This has relieved me from an immeasurable mental and emotional burden for which I never desire to reshoulder. As I continue this journey of life, my mantra has become to simplify anywhere and everywhere I can in my life. The process of simplification takes time (for me it took seven years). The process of shrinking my cognitively distorted perceived responsibilities down to their actual size has likewise taken a good deal of time and effort, but the effort I have invested over time has been worth it. When alchemized with the aid and grace of God, this effort has initiated enormous healing, and allowed me
to regain fuller measures of mental hygiene, peace, and contentment in my life. I am now, at long last, and most thankfully, *Atlas Shrugged*.

**OCD’s Impact on My Life as a Student**

The second worst school year of my life was undoubtedly my senior year. I more or less went from one stressful OCD episode to another all year long. In hindsight, I was a nerd; I really was! I did not see it that way at the time, but then again I also believed for many years that I was a gifted dancer, a delusion I held until I got married. Since tying the knot, my wife—God love her—has successfully cured me of this self-perpetuated delusion. I was one of the only seniors, or even students for that matter, at my high school that rode his/her bike—a $137 beauty purchased new at Costco—to school. Although I did run on the varsity cross-county and track teams, I was otherwise uninvolved in school activities. I never went to a football game on Friday night; I rarely if ever went on a date, and I rarely hung out with peers on the weekends. I was often socially awkward. Most of the year I ate lunch with three Vietnamese underclassmen. I was friendly to them; for the most part they were cordially and awkwardly indifferent to me. Mostly, I ate my lunch in silence while they would prattle on to each other in their native tongue, a vocabulary of which I was entirely unfamiliar. The most significant long-term take-away from this lunch-time association was the knowledge of how to properly pronounce the last name “Nguyen.” One of the more memorable times I did attempt to ask a girl out on a date, I struck out swinging. The event was a concert at the Spokane Arena. The tickets were not cheap, and my parents had sent me enough extra money along with my monthly allowance for me to buy two tickets (one for me and one for a date). My first invitation was rejected by a girl from a well-to-do family. She was
smart, athletic—and in my estimation—a snob. She was, however, attractive, and I was physically infatuated with her. I figured it would be fun (and a great ego boost) to convince a girl like that to go out with me. Problem was, I could not convince her to go out with me! My second attempt failed when I asked a mere friend (who happened to be a girl) to accept the second ticket. She also turned me down with what seemed to me at the time to be a worthy and legitimate excuse; and maybe it really was, or maybe I’m still deluding myself to this day. The third time around, I really went out on a limb by asking out a gorgeous girl who I had a crush on and had met at a church dance earlier in the year. She turned me down because she was going out of town to visit the University she was planning on attending that fall over Spring Break the following week. Her excuse sounded plausible, but all future attempts at asking her out were also unsuccessful. I was disappointed. After this third strike, I was running out of time. Accepting that I was “out,” I ended up taking my male friend Fabian (a German foreign exchange student) to the concert. It’s okay if you laugh; I do now—15 years later—and in between winces! I felt good about giving the ticket to Fabian because he was a really nice guy and a good friend, and I felt like I “owed” him because he had invited out to go see a pro basketball exhibition game several months before, compliments of his host family; but all that aside, I still felt pretty dejected showing up at that much anticipated concert with a guy.

In hindsight, I think that one of my best friends my senior year was one of the elder lunch ladies who, un-cool hair net and white apron notwithstanding, had a warm smile and friendly disposition that attracted extra courtesy on my part. I can still remember her name; it was Teresa. Unlike the typical Ferris Saxon

94 Joel E. Ferris High School’s mascot was the Saxon.
my appreciation for the fare they formulated each day. At the end of the school year, I
even got Teresa’s address near the end of the school year with the intention of maybe
writing to her some day.

It was a far cry from the senior year I had always imagined. While I had some
good, memorable teachers and some meaningful experiences, especially athletically, my
overall experience was hugely disappointing, largely a result of my personal challenges
and attitude so greatly influenced by OCD. That same year, I also experienced a bout of
depression that accompanied my OCD, which even sapped my desire to live. Do not
misunderstand; I was never authentically suicidal. I have never attempted suicide, nor
have I ever taken tangible actions in the pursuit thereof; but I have thought about it
hundreds, if not thousands of times throughout my life. Often I have found myself
envious of the dead and/or dying, those who have passed or are soon passing on through
the portals of this world and into the next, signaling the conclusion of their experiences
“beyond this vale of sorrow”95 and tears. Thoughts bedecked with existential nihilism
and ennui evolved into their own strain of obsessive thinking, which I tended to ruminate
on whenever things got especially unpleasant.

One day as a senior, while feeling quite depressed and sorry for myself, I
scribbled out the following poem.

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The Finish Line

The day was lost, as many had
Another gone, a tragic fad.

Lost, yet I, not really through,
Still saw some hope to start anew,
And climb back up into the sky.

And yet, such fret did cross my face,
For to realize,
The length still in the race,
Placed teardrops in my salty eyes.

Then, in the midst of agony,
My Rubicon comes, and I resolve,

I must not quit,
Run, race the way,
Claw my way out of this pit,

And then one day,
Stand boldly up,
And humbly say:

“Time is done,
And I have crossed
The Finish Line.”

– Jordan Jensen
Spokane, WA / 1997-98 School Year

It is a sad, but hopeful poem, with two dominant themes surfacing. The first is an emotionally laden exposition of the agony of OCD and depression as I experienced it, especially my senior year. The second is a sense of self-will and hope that is still breathing determinedly, albeit shallowly. It is evident that I harbored few illusions at that point in time about the difficulty of transcending OCD and depression, yet a hopeful

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vestige of possibility for a brighter future still resonated within—lukewarm though the
resonance was at the time.

**Social Diffidence and Unease**

OCD took a terrible toll on my social life in junior high and high school. In
elementary school, I was charismatic, cheerful, and extroverted. I had many friends, was
popular with my peers, and was well liked by my teachers. In first grade, I was voted
class president. In third, fourth (I think), and fifth grade, I was voted by my classmates to
represent them in the student council. In fifth grade, I was cast as the lead male role in
the school play. I was routinely one of the first players picked when selecting teams to
play basketball or football on the playground. I was well liked by both my male peers
and my female counterparts. In fifth grade, I even had three different girls vying for my
affection. All three of them asked me to “go out with them,” which, in the playground
parlance of the day meant they wanted me to be their boyfriend. While I determined to
remain “single,” at the time, such interest from the ladies bolstered my youthful
confidence and self-image. I loved the attention—and thrived on it. In short, I was a
very happy, healthy, well adjusted, and well-liked kid. To this day, I consider the time I
spent in Mesa, Arizona between first and sixth grade to be the happiest days of my life.
Some people speak of their *troubled* or *dysfunctional* childhoods; my childhood
experience was the exact opposite. The first 13 years of my life, and particularly the
years spanning first through sixth grade were, and in many ways still are, the *golden
years* of my life.

The onset of my OCD occurred toward the end of my sixth grade year. I have
already described the negative impact it—and other variables—had on my seventh grade
year. While certain positive aspects of these “golden years” extended into my adolescent and young adult years, this later period (7th grade through college graduation and beyond) was significantly influenced—even battered and blunted—by the socially retarding effects of OCD. This was particularly the case when it came to my sociality with peers, including girls. Whereas I had once been an easy-going, fun-loving, natural leader, I evolved into a high-strung, stressed-out, lone wolf. The social ease and confidence I had once enjoyed morphed into an agitated diffidence that filled my mind and heart with a wary suspicion of most of my peers. I specify “peers” because at this period of time I grew increasingly comfortable around, and even fond of, adults, including senior citizens. I felt I could trust adults, and that they could be relied on to act maturely and not say or do things that would precipitate anxiety—a common occurrence when I was with my peers. For example, in between eighth and ninth grade, I attended a basketball camp with my high school basketball team. In many ways it was a painful experience for me. I didn’t mind playing basketball, but when we were just “hanging out,” it seemed that all the guys wanted to do was watch Music Television (MTV) and talk about things that made me feel uncomfortable. As a result, I ended up spending much of my free time reading by myself alone in my room. While there were many factors beyond just OCD that contributed to my growing social dis-ease among my peers (i.e., differing interests and desires and adolescent immaturity on all our parts) OCD always exacerbated these challenges.

The beginning of my OCD years also marked the beginning of my troubles with my relations with the opposite sex. For example, fifth grade was the last time a girl I really liked would “ask me out.” Moreover, it would be 14 long years before I would
finally meet another female I really liked who actually liked me enough back to become
my girlfriend for an extended period of time, and this woman would eventually become
my wife. In the years preceding this point, I often felt like Jacob in the Bible, who had to
wait and labor 14 years before receiving his beloved Rachel to wife.\footnote{See Genesis Chapter 29 (The Old Testament, 1979/2008, p. 43-45).} I will share more
on the affects OCD had on romance in a later vignette.

After I turned 16, I did go on several\footnote{According to my dating journals, I went on 40 dates between ages 16-19½ (my mission). All but one of
these dates was a “group date.” My one “single date” involved taking a girl out to a Church “fireside”
(devotional) at Brigham Young University the fall semester prior to my mission.} group dates with my friends. These group
dates were usually not casual affairs where boys and girls get together and watch a movie
or go out to eat, or merely “hang-out.” Instead, they were usually well planned out and
detailed extravaganzas aimed at impressing the girls and providing an unusually
memorable evening full of surprise, suspense, and entertainment.\footnote{Such group dating practices were culturally typical of Mormon subcultures in the Western United States,
especially in the 1980s and 1990s, although my often elaborate extension of the practice was perhaps more
extravagant than usual. I had observed my older brothers actively involved in dates of this nature, so aside
from merely “impressing” the girls with the group dates my friends and I would organize and direct, I also
desired to surpass my brothers’ and their friends’ erstwhile efforts.} The two most
detailed group dates my friends and I organized were based on a \textit{Robin Hood} and \textit{Mission
Impossible} theme. Another time in the dead of winter we made a fancy dinner for the
girls and served it up underneath a trampoline surrounded by mounds of snow to form a
snow cave. We added some nice music to the atmosphere with a boom box connected to
a power source extending through a cracked window into a room in my parent’s house.
On another occasion, we blindfolded the girls, drove them around for a while to give the
impression we were going somewhere away from town only to drive them right back to
my house where my friends and I had built an enclosed fort constructed mostly of
chopped aspen firewood where we then served them a nice dinner. These group dates
presumably provided wonderful times and memories for all involved, and we often received positive feedback (if not rave reviews) from the girls about their experiences on these group dates. This was all well and fine. The social problem I faced was that I was usually more concerned about directing a seamless production to impress girls than I was on building sincere, authentic friendships with any of them. Whether on these dates or elsewhere, I rarely ventured beyond the basics of token chivalry, superficial small talk, and mostly unsuccessful attempts at flirtation. I simply did not interact much with girls outside of school and/or these elaborate group dates. The result was a stunted social development that I would have to make up for down the road.

Having experienced what it felt like to be popular and admired by the cute girls during my elementary school years, I grew somewhat bitter towards the “in” crowd in high school. I knew I lacked what they had socially, and I often bitterly (and unjustifiably) resented them for it. I even formulated a nickname for the popular kids, calling them “C.V.’s,” which stood for “cool variety.” My little sister Jessie, whom I sometimes accused of as also being a “C.V.” made the comment that I was “just jealous.” She was right! Sometimes on a Friday or Saturday night when I did not have a group date planned, I would drive by one of the “C.V.’s” homes where I would notice a bunch of cars parked. In the small community where I lived, it was easy to determine whose car was whose, and therefore who was part of the “in” crowd hanging out casually and having fun like typical teenagers while I—the outsider—drove past all by my lonesome. Such occasions only further fueled my frustration, bitterness, and jealousy.
In high school, my parents\textsuperscript{100} were my best and closest friends, and the two people I spent the most time with. While I do not view this as an inherent negative by any means, the sheer amount of time I spent with my parents instead of my peers was hugely impacted by my OCD-influenced diffidence and concomitant tendency to avoid close, social relationships with my peers outside of school or church-related obligations and activities. While I think it was great I had such a positive relationship with my parents, my proclivity for being stand-offish with my peers outside of school-related and formal group-dating endeavors ultimately stunted my social growth and development, something I would have to catch up on later in life.

At age nineteen-and-a-half, I left to serve a full-time mission for my church. While this opportunity helped strengthen the bedrock and build the foundation upon which I have endeavored to construct the rest of my life personally (spiritually) and professionally,\textsuperscript{101} it also delayed my social development as it related to persons of the opposite sex for another two years after high school. Thus, by age 22, I was, in many ways, still just an adolescent when it came to forming relationships (romantic or otherwise) with females. It would take several years, two rounds of formal psychotherapy, and many rounds of informal and self-psychotherapy for me to catch up.

While my native personality, individual preferences and interests, and long-term values and goals played a paradoxical role in the retardation of this social developmental growth curve, OCD had its nefarious spoon in the batter as well. More on this topic will be shared in later sections.

\textsuperscript{100}This includes my brother Paul and sister-in-law Amy with whom I spent far more time with my senior year than I did with my peers from church or school.

\textsuperscript{101}My mission did not lead directly into a career path; that was not the point of my service. It did, however, indirectly influence my passion for and pursuit of a career based in education, training, philosophy, and public speaking.
Taking Offense

OCD heightened my sensitivity to just about everything that was going on around me. This intensified an already existing propensity towards being easily offended. Whether it was a parent, a sibling, a friend, a foe, a teacher, a leader, a neighbor/community member, something in the media, or a girl, it did not take much to make me angry, nor did it take much to plant the seed of a long-lasting grudge in my mind and heart towards another person, thing, event, et cetera. In the process, I tended to be quick to judge and slow to forgive and/or forget.

Perhaps the most common subjects of my penchant for holding grudges were two of my older brothers that I spent a lot of time working with as an older teenager and young adult. Being eight and ten years older than me, these brothers were smarter, wiser, and more capable than me at just about any work task we undertook. As a result, they always had more authority when it came to making decisions. When they would make a decision I would not like, or get impatient with me, I was quick to become bitter. Sometimes this bitterness would fester within me for days before I would finally be able to “let it go.” Similar feelings of bitterness ascended routinely in my heart toward companions (partners) I was assigned to work with on my mission. The littlest things would quickly be blown out of proportion in my mind and heart, casting me into a mental and emotional tailspin marked by feelings of rancorous bile.

One of the more salient examples of this tendency toward bitterness involved a girl I had a “crush” on in high school. I asked her out on a date, and ended up holding her hand in a movie. I had undoubtedly moved too quickly and/or assumed she might like me too before I had ample evidence of the fact. It was not the first time I would
“jump-the-gun” and make an audacious move before “the signs” of reciprocation were present. The girl responded by reacting somewhat coldly to me after the movie and in the days following our date. I felt disappointed and embarrassed. My hurt feelings over the incident influenced me to proceed to show her by basically ignoring her for the rest of the school year. I went out of my way to avoid talking to her for months. She was, by nature, a shy person, and did not extend any warmth or social interaction in my direction either—not because she was trying to ignore me, but because she felt awkward and just didn’t know how to respond. I, on the other hand, pridefully allowed an obsessive grudge to keep me from being friends, or at least congenial, with this person. I completely shut myself off from what could have been a lot of positive social interaction with her and her friends, even if it never turned romantic. The friendship that could have been, never really was, and it was my fault. In short, I was a prideful idiot. About a year later, I received a very kind letter from this girl apologizing for having made things extra awkward, and expressing her respect for me, and her desire to be friends. I felt terrible! It was not she who needed to apologize, it was me who needed to say I was sorry; and I did. I called her on the phone and apologized and assured her that all was well. While all may be well that ends well, I think it is sad that I allowed my pride to cheat me out of a potentially positive friendship. Unfortunately, I was slow to learn, and ended up repeating this same error in various ways with many different women before I would finally get things right with Lina.

This was a miserable way to live, and I struggled for years with this deep weakness in my relations with other people. In time, cognitive-behavioral therapy, Self-
Leadership oriented self-help, and the grace of God (specifically petitioned for through prayer) empowered me to largely overcome this debilitating personal shortcoming.

**Depression Joins the Mix**

Over the years, depression has been a first cousin—if not a brother or sister—to my OCD. While not “one-and-the-same” thing, the two have been, and are, closely related for me. For every ten days I’ve spent under the yoke of OCD, five or six of them have been further tainted by depression. Depressive tendencies were likely passed on to me in part genetically. My paternal grandmother, while never diagnosed, was prone to depression. Her son (my father) has battled depression on-and-off much of his adult life, and was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in the mid 1990s. In a letter to his children in 1996, my father wrote to us of his awful experiences with depression:

> For me Depression is the most insidious, debilitating, mind-numbing affliction I have ever faced. I truly hope that you never have to go through what I have been through, and I pray each day that I will never experience it again…. There are blessings associated with every adversity, however. I am a better, stronger, human being for having experienced it.102

Three of my six siblings have also been diagnosed with, and medicated for, depression.

**The Ultimate Joy Killer**

A natural joy killer, depression has not only accompanied my experiences with OCD, it has also morphed into its own unique strain of obsessive thinking. This strain of obsessive thinking is one of the most nefarious in that it seeks to stamp out joy wherever it attempts to blossom in my life.

102 From the personal journal of my sister, Jessie R. Jensen, 1996.
This unusually diabolical strain of OCD has often made it difficult to experience, much less enjoy for any significant length of time, those moments of spontaneous joy that crop up in life for a variety of reasons. This joy-killing process looks something like this: I feel joy for a few short seconds; then, almost as soon as the joyful feelings and/or thought has passed, it is immediately sabotaged by what can be described as a metaphorical artillery barrage and simultaneous frontal infantry assault of the mind. The bullets and shells come in the form of obsessive thoughts aimed at destroying the joy. It is as if the obsession shrieks at me saying, “Listen here dumb ass; don’t you know joy is unacceptable around here? Here’s something really unpleasant to think about; now ruminate on it till all your damn joy is smothered!”

This particular strain of OCD has exerted a ubiquitous omnipresence throughout all other strains I’ve experienced. Indeed, it seems to be the very essence of OCD itself. It is eternally committed to precluding, sabotaging, devastating, and destroying as much peace, happiness, and joy as possible.

**Moments of Relief and Saving Graces**

As unrelenting as OCD and its concomitant depression have been for me, there have been moments of relief. Such moments are saving graces in my life’s journey. Aside from the roles that medication and psychotherapy have played in providing a relief based elixir, I also ascribe such experiences to divine intervention and view such “tender mercies of the Lord”\(^ {103} \) to be a token of His love and grace. Nature—mountains, beaches, deserts, plains, trees, plants, flowers, grass, animals and birds—has often been a salve along my way. The following poem captures the peace I can find in nature, either

\(^{103}\) 1 Nephi 1:20 (*The Book of Mormon*, 1981/2008, p. 3).
literally or figuratively speaking. The “woods” spoken of in this poem represent more than physical geography; they are a symbol for any place where I can find earnestly sought after peace of mind.

**I Went to the Woods to Ponder**

When oft my mind grows worried,
Then I yearn for wooded groves,
How oft alone I’ve scurried,
To solitude in coves.

To country lanes I’ve hastened,
To lands whose heart I know,
My cares away are chastened,
And my troubles cease to grow.

I think I’ll fly to that spot,
Where peace restores my soul,
’Gainst my sore troubles I’ll plot,
And hearts resolve cajole.

There is no other respite,
That heals so soothingly,
My soul at times when desperate,
Retreats, alone with me.

— Jordan Jensen

**Missionary Angst**

From March 1999 to March 2001, I served as a full-time volunteer missionary for my Church. My mission was headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. During the course of my two years service I lived and served in Edmonton, Calgary, Innisfail, and Camrose, Alberta. Considering the obsessive struggles I had already experienced regarding honesty and personal conduct, OCD-related challenges were a foregone conclusion, although I didn’t realize to what extent until I was actually serving.

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104 Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 46).
Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending how you look at it, I was largely unaware of the struggles I’d face. Such is the case with life in general; it is almost impossible to adequately gauge how difficult something will be before you have attempted it. So it was with my mission. Missions are hard for virtually everyone who serves. I have never met a former missionary who reported on his missionary service by pressing a metaphorical Staples button and parroting categorically, “That was easy!” I have heard some comment that from a logistical standpoint, the lifestyle is relatively simple. I have heard others describe it as a “spiritual,” “wonderful,” “incredible,” “life-changing,” “the best two-years of my life,” and even a “fun,” experience, but I’ve never known a returned missionary employ the adjective easy to summarize their overall mission experience.

The inherent difficulty in missionary service can be greatly exacerbated in the case of physical and/or mental issues or illness, which is why there is screening to catch issues before a missionary enters service. While my OCD was not serious enough to prevent me from serving a mission,\footnote{Due to of my OCD diagnosis, however, I did have to receive a “green light” from a mental health professional before I was cleared to serve.} it was intense enough to make an already challenging situation far more difficult.

I entered my mission feeling overconfident both in my own abilities as well as in what and whom I would end up encountering. There were reasons for my overconfidence. My life’s experiences, study of the gospel message and scriptures, propensity for spirituality and religiosity in general, participation in missionary efforts with full-time missionaries prior to my own full-time service, and unbroken activity in the Church throughout my life had prepared me well to teach the message I was called to share with the world. For example, unlike some missionaries who had never even read
the entire *Book of Mormon* prior to their service, I had already finished it eight or nine times, as well as the *New Testament*, and large portions of the *Old Testament, Doctrine of Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*, the four Standard [scriptural canon] Works of the Church. Moreover, my four older brothers had already honorably completed two-year missions of their own in Korea, Canada, Chile, and Ecuador. Two of them had served as assistants\(^{106}\) to their Mission President and two had served as zone leaders.\(^{107}\) I had spoken with them many times about their missionary service. Such conversations had naively led me to believe I knew what I was getting myself into. Despite all this so-called “preparation,” about six weeks into my mission, and about three weeks into my Canadian service,\(^{108}\) I hit a threshold of difficulty that caused me to realize that no matter how well someone is prepared for a mission, they do not really comprehend what it is truly like until they are immersed in full-time service oneself,\(^{109}\) and it was the inordinate difficulty of missionary service that led me to ponder the point. My respect and admiration for my brothers must have increased five-fold that day as I, with the new eyes of *actual* experience, saw the true meaning of their faithful, two-year service. I was even more awestruck that three of them did it in a foreign tongue they were unfamiliar with prior to their service. At least I could still communicate in my native tongue!

One cause of my OCD flair-ups on my mission was my response to the “*White Bible.*” The *White Bible* was a nickname given to a little pocket-sized handbook (white in color) of rules and guidelines for missionaries. As a regular church member, I had

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\(^{106}\) The highest leadership position a missionary can hold.

\(^{107}\) The second highest leadership position a missionary can hold.

\(^{108}\) The first two-and-a-half weeks were spent in training at the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah.

\(^{109}\) This is a good metaphor for any unusually difficult life challenge. I would have a similar experience a decade later as a first-year full time 9th grade English teacher in Houston, Texas. Because of having *actually* done it for a year, I’ll never view teachers in the same way. They are amazing people! Things *always* look easier from the outside looking in.
already struggled deeply in junior high and high school with OCD-influenced flair-ups involving my attempts to uphold Church standards in a letter-of-the-law manner. Now the mission field was upping the ante many-fold with the even higher standards outlined in the White Bible. The rules and regulations contained therein were not unrealistic; in fact, they were quite necessary to maintain order and promote productivity in such a setting as the mission field where a bunch of young men and women in their late teens and early twenties form the bulk of the service force. However, the bar was set very high, especially if one intended on following all the rules, which I did.

As missionaries, we worked together in pairs. Our day began at 6:30 a.m., and sometimes earlier if exercise was scheduled. Our workday began at 7:30 a.m. with personal and companionship study until 9:30, when we would begin our missionary labors, which would continue until 9:30 in the evening with a one-hour break for lunch and dinner. After returning to our residence at night, we would spend time on the phone confirming appointments for the following day and otherwise planning out the next day’s schedule. We usually went to bed in between 10:30 and 11:00, depending on how time intensive our evening planning session was. Our one “day-off” each week wasn’t really a day-off at all, but a preparation, or “P-day,” as we called it. P-days (Mondays in my mission) started off with a formal district meeting involving the four-to-eight missionaries in one’s “district.” Then we would usually play basketball or do something else recreational. Then we would go grocery shopping, attend to our laundry, and write letters home.\textsuperscript{110} While it was not common, there was occasionally time for a nap on P-

\textsuperscript{110} In 2012, most missionaries do at least some e-mailing. At the turn of the century, however, most missionaries, myself included, had to rely exclusively on hand-written communications. Strict rules prevented calling home more than twice a year (Mother’s Day and Christmas). As a result, hand written letters and care packages were precious.
day, an activity I particularly relished when such an opportunity presented itself. P-day officially ended at 6:00 p.m., after which we would resume our proselytizing efforts in typical fashion until 9:30 p.m.

As missionaries, we were not allowed to date, see movies, listen to up-tempo popular music, go swimming, or engage in a whole list of activities we would have naturally done at home. Such rules have evolved over the years, not out of Puritanical piety or masochism on the part of the church, but in an effort to keep missionaries focused on their work as well as physically and morally safe. Working in pairs, or “companionships,” as we called them, we were required to be with our missionary companion at all times. Our purpose was clear, and we were not to deviate from it.

Personally, I did not have a problem with all this. Sure, the work was hard, even exhausting sometimes. The physical, mental, and spiritual demands of the calling were enormous; missionary service was definitely not for the faint of heart. In fact, from a sheer logistical standpoint, I don’t think I’ll ever face a more intensively disciplined work schedule lasting for such a long, uninterrupted period of time for the rest of my life. Even this was okay to me. I was no stranger to hard work and was in good physical shape. As such, if I only had my own personal conduct to worry about, everything would have been relatively peachy. Where OCD really made things difficult, however, was the added responsibility I had for other missionary’s personal conduct (my companion’s, and later members of my district when I served as a district leader). Not surprisingly, not all young missionaries were as motivated (authentically or obsessively) to follow every rule to the letter as I was. This understandably caused interpersonal conflict at times. Even

111 With the obvious exceptions of using the bathroom and sleeping. We were required to sleep in the same room as roommates, but of course, had separate beds.
worse, it caused obsessive *intrapersonal* anxiety for me, and on countless occasions, I
stressed and struggled with how to respond to my companion’s decisions over issues that,
in hindsight, usually involved the “small stuff.” My OCD made such things look like
“big stuff,” and so I stressed, and stewed, obsessed and worried, felt unnecessarily guilty
on a daily basis, and in some cases did much damage to my relationship with other
missionaries because of my irrational proclivity to prioritize rules ahead of human beings.

Some companions were better at following the *White Bible* than were others.
Partly as a result of this, I got along with some companions better than others. One
missionary companion of mine was so lazy, apathetic, and unconcerned with many of the
rules (bless his heart, his parents pretty much forced him on a mission, and he was not
happy about it) that our companionship ended in a pathetic physical fight that was
actually initiated by me. I am a bit ashamed of it all now, and to this day, the incident
lingers as the only instance in my life where I actually threw an intentional punch at
someone. Not known for being a physically aggressive person, my behavior was
uncharacteristic, and indicative of the internal struggle and pent-up feelings I was facing
in that companionship. The day of the fight, we received an “emergency transfer” from
each other, each receiving a different companion to work with from that point on.

All of my companionships were negatively impacted by my obsessive concerns
over what, in many cases, amounted to the relatively meaningless minutia of the
missionary experience. My quibbling over such relatively unimportant letter-of-the-law
specifics almost always did more harm than good. Indeed, my OCD influenced behavior
did much to sour my relationships with other missionaries, and to a large extent, I do not
blame them for the difficulties they faced in dealing with me. In hindsight, I feel quite
sorry for those who had to serve close to me because quite frankly, I could be a real jerk sometimes. While I take consolation in the knowledge that I was well intentioned, and struggling with an obsessive-compulsive neurosis, the fact is that I was still a jerk. In my present estimation, those who served closest to me were far more saintly in nature for patiently putting up with me than they were sinners for whatever minor manner in which they might have strayed now and then from categorical exactness in their adherence to the White Bible. A professional counselor on my mission tried to help me with this tendency to put rules above the person in my companionships. In doing so, he uttered a phrase that has stayed with me ever since, and greatly influenced my success in working through my OCD as it concerns human relationships. He said: “Always err on the side of love for your companion.”

Unfortunately, the main impact of this wise counsel would not be felt until a while after returning home from my mission, as evidenced by an incident that occurred at the very end of my mission. This incident illustrates how obsessive-compulsively high-strung and intense I was, and what a jerk I could be as a result. It also indicates just how little self-awareness and rationality I had gained toward my OCD while on my mission. The incident occurred on the van ride to the airport the day that I and several other missionaries were scheduled to fly home from our missions. Following what I now realize was clearly a cherished tradition, the missionary driving the van popped a tape in the tape deck whereupon our ears were filled with the sounds of selected tracks intentionally designed to rouse our excitement to return back to our homes in the United States (e.g., Neil Diamond’s Coming to America was among the songs on the tape).
Incredibly insensitive to the obvious\textsuperscript{112} human moment transpiring at this emotionally conclusive moment of our missions, I, still utterly shackled by my obsessive quest for letter-of-the-law obedience, could see nothing beyond the fact that these missionaries were staining my last day in the mission field by choosing to play “bandit music,” which in the normal run of things, was against the rules. Burning with frustration inside, I opted to \textit{courageously} summit my soapbox one last time and speak out against the disobedience of listening to such music in the mission field. How foolish I was! And how selfish! In my shameful failure to “see the forest for the trees,” I had terribly tainted a moment that was designed to be, and should have been, special for all of us. Oblivious to the \textit{spirit-of-the-law} (the intention behind the action), I rigidly rained on everyone else’s parade, a parade that, after two years of diligent, unpaid, voluntary service, everyone in that van rightly deserved. Other missionaries in the van responded with awkward silence, not quite sure how to react to my self-righteous recalcitrance over this harmless event. One missionary, however, had had enough, and he let me have it! Vociferously confronting me with a voice elevated nearly to a scream, he angrily bellowed: “Shut up Elder Jensen! Just shut up! You aren’t going to ruin this moment for all of us.” His voice won out, and the music continued to play, but the conviviality of the moment was gone; it had been stolen, and I was the thief. Perhaps this poor missionary (or maybe someone in the van that day) will have an opportunity to someday read this narrative, because if you do, or if you are, I would like to apologize for my myopic dampening of your spirits that day. I was a real jerk, and I am sorry.

While such behavior was obviously influenced by my OCD, it did not change the fact that I could be a real jackass in a variety of social situations. The sad thing was that I

\textsuperscript{112} It is obvious to me now; it wasn’t at the time.
was largely blind to this fact. In my narrow little view of the world, I was not a jerk; other people were the jerks. I was a courageous moral crusader hell-bent on getting to heaven and righteously determined to not let any “fears of men” silence my voice of truth. In reality, I had a big problem, and the problem was with myself. Until I could fully recognize that vital fact, I would remain a blind victim of my OCD.

**Romantic Ruminations**

Following my mission, a new strain of OCD, arguably the most difficult of any I have ever experienced, capitalized on my retarded social growth as it related to my association with girls (now women) and dating. Because of the breadth and depth of this particular strain, and the many experiences surrounding it, I have reserved for its coverage an entire chapter (Chapter Six), and have opted not to elaborate further on the subject in this vignette.

**Existential Frustration, Ennui, Nihilism, Panic Attacks, and Depression**

As I grew into adulthood, many of the OCD strains I had struggled with as an adolescent began to loosen the stranglehold they had maintained during my teenage years. Part of this was a result of therapy and much self-work on my part. Part of it was the grace and blessings of God, and part of it was the natural growth and maturity that came with the passage of time (you might say I was beginning to “grow out of such foolish notions”). This was excellent news. The problem was that my hyperactive mind demanded replacements. As a result, instead of growing out of OCD entirely, in many ways my OCD merely evolved to pick up new, creative strains that my adult heart and brain could take seriously. For example, over time, I got to the point where I largely
stopped ruminating on unwanted sexual thoughts, and obsessively worrying about
accidentally contracting AIDS or somehow arbitrarily ending up with steroids in my
body. In the place of these exiting strains, new strains developed. Fortunately, these new
obsessive strains often lacked a compulsive counterpart. This saved me from a lot of
unnecessary physical exertion. Unfortunately, the obsessions still managed to usurp my
peace of mind with great force.

The new obsessive strain involved philosophy, theology, and existentialism,
thereby exploiting one of my greatest strengths: my contemplative nature. Like Peck
(1997), I am “a born contemplative” (p. 54). Such a nature is marvelously desirable in its
potential to augment self-awareness, self-knowledge, and just about every other
component of Self-Leadership; but it also has a dark side. The frightful underside of this
otherwise enormous personal strength is perhaps best described as “existential
frustration” (Frankl, 2006, p. 100). In employing the term existential, Frankl refers to
“existence itself,” “the meaning of existence,” or “the striving to find a concrete meaning
in personal existence, … [or] the will to meaning” (p. 100). When using the term
existential myself, I do so under the auspices of Frankl’s definitions. Existential
frustration occurs when “man’s will to meaning… [is] frustrated” (p. 100). Such
frustration may lead to “noögenic neuroses” which “emerge from … existential problems
… [of which] frustration of the will to meaning plays a large role” (p. 101). In discussing
the subject of existential frustration, Frankl (2006) also introduces a related concept: the
“existential vacuum” (p. 106). “A widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century [and
presumably the twenty-first century as well], … the existential vacuum manifests itself
mainly in a state of boredom” (p. 106). Frankl (2006) developed a corresponding school
of psychotherapy for treating existential problems: logotherapy. Deviating from Freud’s focus on pleasure and Adler’s focus on power, Frankl’s unique brand of psychotherapy focuses on meaning and is concerned with “the meaning of human existence as well as on man’s search for such a meaning” (p. 98-99). Frankl (2006) also introduces what he refers to as Noö-Dynamics (p. 103), which involve the tension a person feels for an unmet but desirable goal, and the drive of that person to pursue that goal.

I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, ‘homeostasis,’ i.e., a tensionless state. What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him. (p. 105)

After completing my missionary service, I began to find myself occasionally stuck in the existential vacuum as Frankl describes it. This engendered terribly unpleasant thoughts laden with an oppressive sense of existential ennui and nihilism. It led to depression and became my mind’s new preferred (against my will) strain of OCD. The same basic obsessive pattern I had been struggling with since age 10 had spawned a new topic, but with the same hellish results. More than almost any other strain I have struggled with, this newest strain was perhaps the most lethal of all to peace, contentment, and joy.

To illustrate how this strain of OCD could wreak havoc on my peace of mind, consider the following example. One of my life’s most important goals was to someday get married in an LDS temple to a woman I really liked, respected, and loved. As the next chapter will illustrate, this was also one of the most difficult and time-consuming goals for me to eventually realize. Once I finally did tie the knot, however, that Everest-esque goal had been accomplished, and the challenging, but deeply meaningful “tension”
that Frankl (2006, p. 105) referred to was largely released in literally one day’s time. This significant event posed new psychological consequences for me. The day after our wedding, and despite the wonderful perks\textsuperscript{113} of having accomplished my goal of developing and securing the most important human relationship\textsuperscript{114} in my life both up to that point in my life and forever thereafter, I began to struggle deeply and painfully with the existential frustrations that came with the loss of tension signaled by this realization of my lifelong objective. The same pattern of OCD that been evolving for nearly two decades quickly latched on to this existential frustration and contributed to my developing a noögenic neurosis in the existential vacuum that has been difficult to shake. Indeed, at the time of this writing nearly five years after our wedding, I still struggle with it to varying degrees nearly every day of my life. Some days are much better than others, but the struggle is real, continual, and often accompanied by sudden moments of existential dread akin to minor anxiety and/or panic attacks. Such attacks may last for only a few seconds or minutes, but their after shocks may last for several hours or days. Symptoms include a fear of life, of work, of challenge, of struggle, of boredom, of interpersonal confrontation, and the endlessness of existence (as I believe existence to be). Interestingly enough, death is \textit{not} one of my fears. While I do not have a death wish, nor am I suicidal, and while I deeply desire to accomplish certain things before I pass away from this life, I do not possess an inherent fear of death. I see it for what it is, or what I believe it to \textit{be}: a simple transfer into another state of \textit{being} and living spiritually speaking, and since I view the next stage of my eternal life as being a great

\textsuperscript{113} There were many perks of being married to Lina. Perhaps the most salient perk, however, was getting to have sex with my cherished wife and best friend! Oh what a perk that was for a Mormon boy like me, who had kneeled at the wedding altar a virgin.

\textsuperscript{114} Second only to the spiritual relationship I hold to Deity.
improvement from this world, death is ultimately a very positive concept, one to be looked forward to with optimistic anticipation. I especially view death as a welcomed phenomenon when I am facing existential frustration, dread, or depression because it signals a potential means of relief from the pain of this world and of my OCD and depression. Accompanying this belief, however, is another belief that suicide would be a huge step backwards in my eternal existential progression; it is, therefore, and thankfully, not an option. I must exercise my own Self-Leadership continually then to seek out solutions to the pain I feel and the challenges I experience. Despite whatever challenges come, or how deep they penetrate my mind, heart, and spirit, I refuse to give up on living life until I reach the point of natural and/or accidental physical expiration.

The most helpful panacea to this existential frustration comes in the form of new goals and objectives that actively engage my mind. Indeed, my mind yearns for a purpose, for meaning, for worthy objectives to pursue, even for that positive “tension” that Frankl (2006, p. 105) wrote about. Indeed, I am the happiest when I am “on task” with a project that is personally and/or existentially fulfilling, or otherwise fully engaged mentally. Complete mental engagement of any kind is extremely helpful. This is why I find activities such as writing, speaking, downhill mountain bike riding, vigorous physical exercise or work, playing video games and fantasy baseball, and other, similar activities to be so enjoyable, satisfying, fulfilling, and fun. Another practice that helps me to extricate myself out of the existential vacuum is to focus on blessings I now enjoy—because of accomplished goals—that I did not enjoy prior to the realization of those goals.
Despite these efforts and their positive effects, I still find myself stuck almost routinely in the existential vacuum and “existential problems” (Frankl, 2006, p. 101) and the depression that accompanies them represent the largest and most dominant strain of OCD in my life since I got married.

I now share a few poems aimed at capturing what it is like to be flummoxed in the existential vacuum. It may be that these poems capture the mental, emotional, spiritual, and existential nature of this unique strain of OCD better than their preceding prosaic presentation.

In this first poem, a sonnet, I bewail the anguish of mortal time, which is filled with pain when spent in the angst-filled agonies of an obsessively influenced existential vacuum.

**Sonnet 21**

*The Passage of Time*

Thanks be to God for the passage of time,
That life marches on to a welcomed grave,
Where at last we may hasten the sublime
Status of being, in a new enclave
Outside of time—that fleeting enemy—
Which serveth death to each blessed moment
We would fain prolong through eternity.
When after all each precious second sent
Away, lost, returns with divine interest
Into the holy coffers of the soul,
Wherein we may perpetually invest
In glory that ne’er dies, which doth cajole
   A sharpened focus of my use of time;
That I, by spades, might yet summit the climb.

– Jordan Jensen

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115 Previously unpublished.
While my religious beliefs allow me to hold out hope for a period after life that is outside of time to include the eternal *now*, I still must struggle through the ongoing march of time here in life, a fact that often proves painful to me. Suicide is something I have thought about obsessively through times spent in the existential vacuum. Nevertheless, for all the reasons spoken of above, suicide is not, nor ever will be, a viable option for me. I must go on living. In so many ways I sincerely *want* to go on living until my time on Earth is done, but living with OCD and depression on top of life’s many other trials and crises is to endure pain, sometimes severely so. This is not to say that I do not experience many pleasant, happy, joyful, satisfactory, and fulfilling moments in my life. I do, and feel extremely grateful to my Maker for each such moment. Nevertheless, I am under no illusions about the realities of life, and share Abraham Lincoln’s appreciation of William Knox’s poem: *Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?*

**Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?**
Like a swift fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around, and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall molder to dust and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved;
The mother that infant’s affection who proved;
The husband that mother and infant who blessed,
Each, all, are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure,—her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those who loved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

116 1789-1925
117 Reprinted from Knox (1876), page numbers unavailable.
THE hand of the king that the scepter hath borne;
The brow of the priest that the mitre hath worn;
The eye of the sage and the heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depth of the grave.

THE peasant whose lot was to sow and to reap;
The herdsman, who climbed with his goats up the steep;
The beggar, who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

THE saint who enjoyed the communion of heaven,
The sinner who dared to remain unforgiven,
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes, like the flower or the weed
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes, even those we behold,
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

FOR we are the same our fathers have been;
We see the same sights our fathers have seen,—
We drink the same stream and view the same sun,
And run the same course our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking our fathers would shrink;
To the life we are clinging they also would cling;
But it speeds for us all, like a bird on the wing.

THEY loved, but the story we cannot unfold;
They scorned, but the heart of the haughty is cold;
They grieved, but no wail from their slumbers will come;
They joyed, but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died, ay! they died: and we things that are now,
Who walk on the turf that lies over their brow,
Who make in their dwelling a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage road.

YEA! hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
We mingle together in sunshine and rain;
And the smiles and the tears, the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,  
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud,—  
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

In my appreciation of such a poem, I do not share the author’s sense of death’s dreariness. Rather, I have caught myself, at times, yearning almost obsessively for death, “for in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause.” (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 127)\footnote{Hamlet Act III, Scene I, lines 74-76.} For me, such “pauses” do not germinate fear, but rather invigorate hope, since I hold with Wordsworth’s claim that:

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  

I am also hopeful and faithful in my conviction that he penned veraciously when he wrote that man has,

“For[otten] the glories he hath known,  
And the imperial palace whence he came” (p. 61).

I hold with Wordsworth that as human beings—sons and daughters of God—our mortal sojourn represents our condescension from an erstwhile, premortal residence that far surpassed the relatively bleak existence we are familiar with in this world. Moreover, I hope for, and exercise faith in, a world that transcends anything I have yet known premortally or mortally, which awaits me after this life if I live worthy of it. As such, and despite any and all of its pleasures, joys, blissful surprises, satisfactions, and opportunities this life has to offer, I see it as being but a shadow of the glories that human
beings are capable of attaining beyond this “vale of sorrow”\textsuperscript{119} and tears. Harboring this belief has many benefits. For example, it promotes the perpetuity of hope, and motivates me to act in faith upon principle even when I don’t feel like it. On the other hand, it also carries with it—for me—obsessive ruminations of a pre- and afterlife, and the perceived drabness of this present existence in perceptual comparison.

In another of his poetical masterpieces, that august British poet laureate (Wordsworth) once lamented the woeful state of the worldly when he exclaimed in his immortal sonnet:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers—
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.\textsuperscript{120}

My obsessive ruminations about the otherworldly have often mired me in a conundrum 180 degrees removed from the vices that spurred Wordsworth’s pen. Thus I responded:

\textbf{Sonnet 17}\textsuperscript{121}

\textit{The World is Not Enough With Me}

The world is not enough with me, NOW,
Too much time spent thinking and forecasting,

\textsuperscript{120} Reprinted from Rolfe, W. J. (1889). \textit{Select poems of William Wordsworth} (Google Books version). Pages 120-121.
\textsuperscript{121} Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 48).
Trying too hard to see it all—blasting
The feelings and peace—I fail to allow
Real emotions, the wonder, the WOW,
The satisfied sense of sweat on my brow,
And pure joy—spontaneous in my youth—
The unsullied acquisition of truth,
It moves me not! Great God, I’d rather be
A zealot, willing to fight and to die
For any just cause that might make me free,
Possessing the will to work and to try,
What e’er it may take through eternity
To gain the God granted privilege to fly.

– Jordan Jensen

Miscellaneous Symptoms (Obsessions & Compulsions)

Below I have included some “mini-vignettes” that highlight some additional obsessive and/or compulsive experiences I have as I have battled OCD over the years.

- While working for my brothers in their shelving business, it was not uncommon to spend all day on a Saturday building shelves in a customer’s garage or basement. While the work could be tiring, noisy, dusty, and dark, it was not particularly mentally engaging, at least not the jobs I was assigned. As a result, I could get my work done while being almost entirely engaged mentally with some other matter. This proved psychologically exhausting and distressing to me on many occasions because of my obsessive-compulsive tendencies. It would start off by ruminating obsessively about some stress or worry that was on my mind. Perhaps I was feeling guilty or regretful about something I’d said, done, or that had happened to me recently. With the trigger pulled, I would find myself stuck in these garages and basements with little to distract my attention from the fixation of the obsession. The ruminations would be so intense and so long
lasting that I would often find myself mentally exhausted (on top of physically worn) at the end of the day. It made my head hurt.

- While out for a run, it is not uncommon to observe a nail on the sidewalk, or a piece of trash that is not in its proper receptacle, or a piece of broken glass lying idly along the roadside where some thoughtless automobile occupant or pedestrian had carelessly littered from their moving automobile, or a pothole that had not been filled, or an electrical, water, or sewer box/hole cover had not been properly replaced. Such sights have often become triggers to obsessive worries that because I saw it, it therefore becomes my responsibility to “fix” the problem by throwing the item in the trash, remove it out of the pathways of bicycles and/or vehicles, and/or otherwise do my civic duty to help others avoid a potentially negative or harmful contact with the misplaced or littered item. To a certain extent, such a sense of civic-mindedness and the desire to keep one’s community clean and safe is reasonable, even commendable. The problem is that you cannot clean up the neighborhood and go for a continuous run at the same time, yet there will always be little things (and sometimes big things) out of place in this world, even in well-groomed and/or professionally maintained neighborhoods. Therefore, the obsessive worries that would accompany my attempt to fulfill both desires produced much anxiety and made it difficult to enjoy running: an activity that I found naturally rewarding.

- While in school, I often felt an intense anxiety on Friday afternoons because of a keen sense of responsibility to say something to someone, or do something for
someone, that I believed might have a significant impact on that person during the course of the weekend before I would see them at school again. I worried that if I didn’t say or do whatever I was supposed to say or do, it might result in something bad happening to that person, and/or make me guilty of a “sin of omission” (as opposed to a sin of commission). This strain of OCD evolved out of my obsessive tendency to fabricate divine promptings and an obsessive “do-gooder” complex that I had developed.

- I often obsessively feared that if I thought a certain thought, or failed to comply with a certain compulsion, that it would arbitrarily cause harm to a member of my family or someone else, even though my thought(s) and/or actions(s) held no connection to the person I had surmised would be forced to pay the penalty. For example, one Friday afternoon I was playing out in the yard and was feeling excited because my older brother and his wife were going to be coming home from college for the weekend. This excitement was soon replaced, however, with the obsessive concern that if I didn’t stop playing and go and clean the bathroom in preparation for their arrival, they might get in a car accident on their drive home and die, and it would be my fault.

- Once as a scout, I went on a winter camp to a cabin in the mountains. A significant part of the journey to the cabin involved riding snowmobiles driven by scout leaders or other adult males. This meant I had to ride on the back of the snowmobile and sit up close against another man or boy for my own safety. Because of the close physical proximity with another person, unwanted, obtrusive
sexual obsessions plagued my thoughts the full length of the journey. Such thoughts were a far cry from the arousing thoughts of sexual desire. Conversely, they were the miserable thoughts of an agonized boy unable to control his own mind. Relief for this awful obsession was only secured once we had reached our destination and I could dismount the snowmobile.

- In the early stages of my most feared sexual obsessions, I was so horrified and repulsed by the thoughts I was having that I developed a compulsive refusal to properly wash the genital area of my body while showering. This compulsion lasted for approximately two or three months, leading to a personal hygiene problem. As I began to take notice of the problem, I fortunately recognized it as being quite abnormal. Only then was I able to reason within myself that I must force myself to practice proper full-body cleansing. Thought I did not know it at the time, taking action to mollify this situation was a classic example of exposure response prevention (ERP), and it worked to alleviate my obsessions and compulsions in the matter.

- Sometimes I experienced physical symptoms as part of my experience with OCD. Some of the most memorably challenging physical symptoms took place during one of the most difficult romantic rejections I experienced (more on that subject in the next chapter). I record how I felt in the following journal entry.

**Thurs. April 15, 2004**

Jody woke me up this morning with a phone call. My phone doesn’t work unless I go outside in the backyard so I missed it but called her back. I awoke filled with hideous anxiety from thoughts about ———.
It was good to hear from Jody. I am thinking that she might have talked to Joe last night because she seemed to be calling to comfort me and cheer me up.

I didn’t have work with Nu Skin today. They didn’t need me. I had a horrible day psychologically and mentally. I felt more extreme symptoms than ever before when it comes to feeling almost like I was beginning to lose control of myself. It was not very good or pleasant. I feel pressure in my head as if it is beginning to boil or something—and there is a mild sensation that feels like blood is being pumped from my brain outward against my skull. There are times when I think that perhaps a bullet right through the middle of it all might alleviate some of the tension. I say that partly in jest because I am not suicidal—aside from the fact that suicide is one of the many obsessive thoughts that uncontrollably comes. But, there are times when I wish that my brain could just get a break from the endless race.

**Getting Help**

This section details my experiences working with six different professional and/or semi-professional counselors in an effort to become self-aware of, proactively confront, and otherwise strive to effectively manage my obsessive-compulsive disorder. My motivation to get help came in part from observing the troubling symptoms and negative affects I had observed my Dad experience with his bi-polar disorder. It also came from a deep inner desire to transcend the disorder in order to accomplish important life goals, especially as they related to marriage, family, schooling, and my career. I knew that if I did not take responsibility for my OCD, it, rather then me, would be in charge of my life, and I would fail to realize the realistic visions I held for myself in the future.

After living with obsessive-compulsive disorder for over two decades, I am strongly persuaded that I will never be *entirely* free of OCD-related symptoms in this life. That is the bad news. The good news is I have discovered that with persistent and

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122 The graduate students counseling me at the BYU Comprehensive Clinic were not licensed professionals; however, they were well along their way to becoming such.
dedicated Self-Leadership, a passionate will to succeed, professional help, medication, and the grace of God, I can retain the power to at least manage the disorder effectively. I am not a victim of OCD, nor do I ever aim to become one. I am not a prisoner of the psychological label, obsessive-compulsive disorder, although having a name for my affliction has bolstered my self-awareness and empowered me with the information necessary to successfully combat it. I do not have to be defined by the involuntary thoughts that spring uninvited into my head. There are things I can do to overcome. I am still sovereign of my own life and its direction. I am in charge of me; OCD is not.

When I was still in high school, while I was still just learning about OCD, I completed a research paper on the subject. In so doing, there was one particular professional reference I cited. The message and meaning of this article has remained with me to this day.

Our aim should be to raise a victim’s awareness to the level where they know they have a choice – a choice to think what they want to think and a choice not to be victims of intrusive thoughts or compulsions any more. This naturally involves healing very negative thought patterns built up over years and releasing bottled up emotions. The main thrust, I think, should be to free patients enough so they perceive the underlying story of their own lives and to help them release energy enough to enable them to rewrite the “script”.... In general I think patients will need to take responsibility for their condition and work quite intensely with a number of different healing methods, particularly some form of psychotherapy, and be prepared to make changes to their lifestyle.... Most of all, patients must realise [sic] that compulsive behaviour [sic] began with a choice at some level, and conscious choice is the key to breaking it. (Simblist, 1998, p. 19)

It was in the spirit of Simblist’s words that I pursued professional and self-help in a proactive manner. Every time I visited with a professional, even as an underage adolescent, I did so willingly. I do not say this to impress anyone, but to impress upon everyone that the operative word here is will. Moreover, as much, or perhaps more than

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123 Simblist is an Australian scholar who writes using traditional British spellings of some words.
any other factor, it is this self-will that has fueled and empowered my success in managing the disorder so that I, not it, was ultimately in control of my life.

Peck (1997, 1978) suggests that rather than classifying the human race into the simplistic dichotomy of mentally healthy persons and mentally ill persons, it is more accurate to view mankind as existing along a spectrum of mental health; therefore, all persons are mentally ill to one degree or another. Finally, he states his belief “that all psychological disorders are basically disorders of consciousness. They are not rooted in … a conscious mind that refuses to think and is unwilling to deal with certain issues, bear certain feelings, or tolerate certain pain” (1997, p. 75). Thus, by making the connection between consciousness and mental health, he explains that, “therapy’s purpose is to help people become more aware so that they can think more clearly and live their lives more effectively and efficiently” (p. 78). Accomplishing these goals of increased consciousness, effectiveness, and efficiency in a patient’s life, much is required of the patient (self-leader). There is no therapist (no matter how effective), and there is no pill (no matter how potent or efficacious) that can fix the problems (internal or external) of a sovereign individual who lacks the will to improve. Peck (1997) emphasizes that if psychotherapeutic processes are to be successful, the onus of responsibility for progress falls primarily on the person seeking psychotherapy, not on the shoulders of the health care professional. The duties attached to this responsibility are great. It requires a heightened “awareness of [one’s] own feelings and imperfections” (p. 79), a “…willingness to think in broader ways or to handle different situations creatively” (p. 77), a willingness to “tolerate pain” (p. 75), “great internal strength” (p. 85) and “self-control” (p. 81). Peck (1997) equates “a high degree of consciousness” and “self-
control” to “psychological competence” (p. 81), which is the goal of psychotherapy.
Hence, victims of mental illness, especially neurotic (as opposed to psychotic) illnesse
are, in the final analysis, only victims if they choose to be. Being a victor over, as
opposed to a victim of, mental illness does not necessarily mean an individual will ever
be completely free of neurotic symptoms in the same way that an injured athlete may heal
fully and return to action at 100% physical health. I am certainly not omnipotent over my
OCD; however, my experience of working to manage my OCD has taught me that as an
individual, I can choose to take the reigns of personal sovereignty whereby I can (if I
will) gradually gain an increasing measure of control over my disorder, rather than
becoming controlled by the affliction. After all is said and done, I, as an individual, can
decide who is in control: me, or my OCD. Part of this self-sovereignty is being able to 1)
Recognize when I need help beyond self-help and divine assistance, and 2) Mustering up
the courage to seek help, and the determination to see the psychotherapeutic process
through to completion. Peck (1997) explains that, “psychotherapy … is about power”
(p. 78)—the personal power and competence one can gain through psychotherapy which
empowers one with the ability to determine one’s own destiny despite whatever
psychological challenges one may face.

From ages 13-17, I did not know I had OCD. I just thought that I was “weird” and “different” from everyone else. I hid my obsessions and compulsions as best I could.

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124 When mental illness advances beyond the stages of neurosis to the more advanced stages of psychosis, there is a point when an otherwise autonomous individual capable of growing through their mental illness may no longer be reasonably accountable for their mental state and/or physical actions. The diagnosis and assessment of neurosis and/or psychosis in an individual is the business of licensed mental health care professionals, and should not involve casual guesswork.
125 Taking complete ownership is key.
126 How can a patient know when psychotherapy has been completed? Peck (1997) offers a suggestion: “There’s no need for therapy when you’re clearly growing well without it.” He suggests further that you know when you need to go into therapy when you are “stuck and spinning [y]our wheels, [and] obviously in a condition of inefficiency” (p. 76).
Even when I was not hiding them (e.g. when I talked to my parents about unwanted thoughts) those seeking to help me, such as my parents, did not have sufficient background knowledge of abnormal psychology to understand what was really going on. While my parents were very supportive and loving of me through this difficult period, they were also quite ignorant of what was wrong and specifically how they could help me.

The tide turned in an unexpected fashion. My father, who had experienced minor bouts of depression throughout his adult life, began to experience severe depression in 1996. That summer, things got so bad that he moved out of our house for a period of time to live in the basement of my Grandma and Grandpa Jensen’s home (his parents). For months, he rarely left their basement, or even his bed for that matter. Many years later, while on a road trip with my father, he confessed to me that he had been suicidal that summer, and had even taken tangible actions to culminate the deed. After taking steps to carry out his plan, a simple—but important—event occurred, which he attributes to divine intervention. This event jolted him from the precarious stupor that had led him to the brink, and he thankfully abandoned his plan. I have ever been grateful for the blessed circumvention of his dire design that nearly fateful day.

Fortunately, he pursued professional help. Visiting a psychiatrist in Salt Lake City (five hours drive from our home in Monticello), he was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, a form of manic depression, and began taking lithium to treat it. Having a clinically diagnosable label for his affliction led indirectly to the discovery of my OCD. One day, while reflecting on my Dad’s recent diagnosis, I had an idea. “Maybe,” I thought to myself, “my weird thoughts and actions could also have a diagnosis like Dad
has with his bi-polar. I am probably not bi-polar, but maybe there is another disorder that
could describe my ‘weird’ and ‘crazy’ symptoms.” I started doing research, and was
amazed by what I found. My search began in my rural high school’s paltry library where
I found a book with information on agoraphobia. Some of the symptoms looked familiar,
but it did not exactly color in the lines of what I was suffering from. My next step was to
browse the Internet, which had but recently come to our community, and was still coming
of age in society at large. Before long, I came across some information about obsessive-
compulsive disorder. The more I read, the more certain I became that I had found the
mental disorder that most closely matched my symptoms. This was a glorious occasion
for me because it spawned great hope for getting help, just as my father had done.

Several months later, in January 1997, I visited the same psychiatrist who had
diagnosed my Dad with bi-polar the year previously. After meeting with me, he
officially diagnosed me with OCD and suggested I begin orally taking the drug Luvox
(fluvoxamine). I continued taking medication for several months and found a noticeable
measure of relief from, and a decrease in, my symptoms from doing so. Aspects of my
social life and other areas of my life seemed to simultaneously and, to some extent,
independently take a turn for the positive. Of course, some of these positive results may
have been merely circumstantial, but over the years, and after having gone “on” and “off”
médication multiple times, there is an unmistakable pattern of general improvement
whenever I go “on” the medication. The challenge was then, and still is today, to
accurately determine the causal relation (percentage-wise) between the medication and
the general improvement of things. In other words, the question in my mind is always:
“Did things get better generally because I began taking the medication again, or did they
get better simply because they got better (i.e., circumstances improved).” I cannot answer this question with empirical precision, and there is no doubt that cognitive-behavioral therapy played a huge (and primary) role in any long-term improvement of element of my OCD and/or depression related symptoms; nevertheless, I cannot deny the fact that whenever I go “on” medication, my symptoms (esp. obsessive thoughts) decrease in both repetition and intensity, which is always a welcomed state of being. It is true that life circumstances have played a major role in when I have gone “on” medication and when I have gone “off” medication in the past. In other words, when things are not going very well, my OCD tends to become more inflamed than usual; when things are going just fine, my OCD, while still hanging around (it never leaves entirely), is a less boisterous guest at the dinner table of my life.

I do not remember exactly when I stopped taking Luvox, but I moved to Spokane, Washington in August 1997 (six months or so after I began taking medication) and I do not recall taking the medication in Spokane. In hindsight, it is certainly possible that this was one of the contributing factors that made my senior year of high school so much more difficult than my junior year. Thus began an extended period of pharmacotherapeutic treatments for OCD that would continue intermittently up until the present day (2013).

My first extended (more than one visit) counseling regimen took place in Spokane, Washington where I met with a counselor (not an MD) at LDS Social Services presently known as LDS Family Services for a couple of office visits in 1998. In the fall of 1998, I had a couple more

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127 Only licensed Medical Doctors (e.g. psychiatrist) can prescribe medication. Most of my counseling prior to 2011 was conducted by counselors rather than doctors or psychiatrists.
128 Presently known as LDS Family Services, the professional counseling arm of the LDS Church.
sessions with a different counselor in Denver, Colorado. The main purpose of my visits with this counselor was to gain professional clearance so I could serve my mission.

In the mission field, all missionaries received personal interviews from the Mission President every four-six weeks. Over the course of my interviews with my Mission President, it became increasingly evident to him that my issues with OCD required further counseling beyond what he was able to provide, so he referred me to LDS Social Services where I attended four or five professional counseling sessions that proved both illuminating and helpful.

When I got home from my mission, I experienced a profoundly difficult and disappointing romantic letdown, the profundity of which stemmed from my obsessive-compulsive neurosis working in concert with my underdeveloped social skills in regards to dating and women. The emotional fallout from the situation was so severe that I sought out professional counseling. This was the first time I had done so independent of my parents, family members, or ecclesiastical leaders. The good news in this situation was that I had become sufficiently self-aware to realize all on my own that I needed help; more importantly, I exercised the willingness, including the courage, proactivity, persistence, and consistence to pursue it to completion.

As a poor college student, I was concerned about how I would pay for professional counseling. Fortunately, I discovered an opportunity whereby I could obtain semi-professional counseling services at a drastically discounted rate at the

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129 More on this in the next vignette.
130 Seeking out psychotherapy as a freshman in college did require courage. I think it requires courage no matter who one is or what one’s age, but it perhaps required more courage than ever as a young college student—a period of time when I strongly desired to fit in with my peers and be viewed as attractive to persons of the opposite sex. As you might imagine, therefore, my entrance into psychotherapy was not exactly something I was eager to advertise to others. Nevertheless, I was, in one way, excited about it, because I felt confident that confronting my issues and engaging in the hard work required to successfully combat them would surely lead to a better life and future.
Comprehensive Clinic at Brigham Young University (BYU). I was attending Utah
Valley State College (now Utah Valley University), at the time, but lived in off-campus
BYU housing. The Comprehensive Clinic was a counseling center where BYU graduate
students who were not yet officially licensed obtained experience by providing
counseling services at a reduced rate. For a mere $15 per session, I could get the
psychotherapy I needed, and if for whatever reason the $15 became too costly for my
budget, they would provide the services pro bono.

![BYU COMPREHENSIVE CLINIC RECEIPT](image)

*Figure 90. A receipt of mine from the Comprehensive Clinic, dated May 23, 2002.*

Taking advantage of this uniquely affordable opportunity, I pursued regular,
ongoing psychotherapy for the first time in my life. I started out meeting with my
counselor at least once a week. Over time, I tapered my visits to once every-other-week,
and so forth, but continued to meet with her until she moved on from the Comprehensive
Clinic. I spent a total of 10 months in psychotherapy. The following journal entries shed
some detailed light on some of my experiences with, and attitudes toward, the
psychotherapeutic process and the counselor who facilitated my progress.
Thursday, October 11, 2001

I ha[d] a psychological evaluation done today. Met w/ a fellow named ——— who got a background idea of my struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. I took a personality test as part of it, which was 240 questions long.

I then met w/ my therapist ——— for the second time. Was productive insofar as she helped me identify one of the symptoms of which I had not though of much before. That is a mind which has thoughts which race and race. She pointed out how my very way of presenting info to her comes out quickly, and jumps from here to there. Anyway, it was very eye-opening to have that point elucidated to me, for I have never thought about or realized this in specific terms as a concrete issue in the matter.

Thursday, October 18, 2001

Today I spent four hours at the comprehensive clinic. Took a 500+ question test, by far the longest test, question-wise, I have ever taken. It was true-false and it was a personality test, and was easy to take and went quickly, but the sheer quantity of questions was a hair intimidating. Then I took another 90 question test, and waited for my session of therapy w/ ——— which went very well. I learned a lot of good stuff.

Thursday, October 25, 2001

Good day, quick day—studied, had a therapy session w/ ———. It went well. She taught me a relaxing exercise which should be beneficial. I also did some more testing w/ ———. One of them was an ink blot test where he would show me some abstract ink blotches, symmetrical in form, and would ask me what I saw in them. Then he recorded everything I said. Afterward I took another true-false personality test of 170 questions or so.


Had a nice day. Got some homework done, and had an excellent therapy session with ———. I am feeling more comfortable w/ her as our sessions go on. Today’s session was very productive, and I came away with some concrete items to work on.

Sun. November 11, 2001

I think I was very mature tonight. Spent some time w/ a girl named ——— tonight. She is a cute girl—I guess. I was proud of myself to be able to talk w/ her and strive to get closer to someone as my Psycho-therapist ———— has asked
me to strive to do—to just try and get closer to people, in fact she even assigned me a few weeks ago to try to have an emotionally based conversation w/ a female.

Am feeling good about myself today.

**Tuesday, November 27, 2001**

Today was a lovely day. Helped tend the food station at the institute fundraiser for “Tute for Tots” which is raising money to help needy families this Christmas.

I went to a psychotherapy session today w/ my therapist ———. She is great. Had a great session and made some progress I feel. Her emphasis of solution is based on really pounding the exposure-response treatment, in ways I haven’t so much done.

**Thursday, December 6, 2001**

Today I had a review w/ ——— at the clinic of how my psychological assessment went—that was all those tests I took about six weeks ago. My patriarchal blessing instructs me to “be mindful of (my) weaknesses, be aware of (my) strengths.” Today I had the chance to hear at point blank range, and in plain words of biting sharpness 38 pointed weaknesses or areas of neurosis and cognitive distortions that became evident by the results of the tests.

At the time, I had a hard time holding in the laughter, because it just seemed funny to me. Tonight it doesn’t seem so funny to me anymore. What I see is a re-affirmation of the reality and severity of my neurosis, and an uphill battle yet to fight.

The results of my combined psychometric testing, as described in the entries above revealed the following about my psychological state of being. (*Note:* I mentioned 38 items in my journal entry, but when I wrote them all down in my “OCD Journal,” there were actually 43. I transcribe them verbatim below).

- Extreme insecurity
- Demanding of self
- Heightened anger
- Demanding of others
• Extreme anxiety
• Skepticism and cynicism
• Lacking functional competencies (see myself as weak)
• Hyper alert about environment
• Health problems
• Overemphasize rationality
• Apprehensiveness
• Self-critical
• Plagued by self-doubt
• Distortion of problems
• Over-react to stress
• Lack poise in social situations
• Ambivalent, tendency to vacillate
• Lack energy to cope with problems
• Depression
• Do not really warm up to others, but actively seek out social life
• Feel some isolation w/ male counterparts because of certain inherent feminine interests
• Might possibly like to participate in child rearing and housekeeping
• Appreciate feeling wrought out in artful endeavors and [have] aesthetic inclinations
• Difficult[y] incorporating values in my own schema. Focused on interior goings on. (Rep. in my mind about how the world works or should work).
• Difficulty trusting others

• [Perceive] others’ actions [as] ingenuine

• Blunt with others

• Not readily modest with others

• Blunt with good motives

• Order centered

• [Trouble] tolerat[ing] discomfort—inability to delay gratification for extended period of time

• Need to achieve

• Unwanted disturbing thoughts

• [Tendency] to ruminate, brood

• Lack of family understanding of what I am going through

• Problems with losing control of thought (losing mind)

• Strange thoughts

• Feeling like unreal

• Difficult to process feeling[s]

• Daily activities are boring, unrewarding

• Self deprecation; hard on myself

• Marked discomfort during interpersonal interactions.

• Irrational or disproportionate persistent fear response

**Thursday May 23, 2002**

I had an appointment with ——— today. The coolest thing was that I was able to tell her that there really wasn’t a lot to talk about, because I am doing so well as far as working situations through on my own. It was a lovely visit. She asked
about how I was doing with the ——— situation and I said okay—and explained that having met ——— was a big help. I took the opportunity to express a heartfelt thanks to her for all she has done. I expressed that she has changed my life, and she in truth has had a critical influence on my life. I am so grateful that I took the initiative to begin this intensive period of psychotherapy, and the results have been astoundingly successful.

**Wednesday August 14, 2002**

I had my last visit with ——— this morning. She is not going to be doing psychotherapy at the comprehensive clinic anymore. It was a good visit, and I focused mostly on giving her a travel log of my romantic woes I have experienced since I last met with her. It wasn’t the wisest way to go about it, and it led me to feel a bit poorly most of the day, as it induced me to obsess about it all.

During the same time I was receiving counseling at the Comprehensive Clinic, I was also seeing a psychiatrist, albeit far less frequently (he was much more expensive!). The main purpose, of course, of my visits with the MD was to get a prescription for medication. I expressed my interest in trying something other than Luvox this time, just to observe the results. I proscribed that I take the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) Celexa (Citalopram). My journal records are spotty regarding my medicinal treatments, but I do know that I went on the medication in late February 2002, and was still on it eight months later, as the following entry recounts:

**Tuesday October 1, 2002**

Productive day. Ended up giving my other free ticket to a pretty girl in another of my classes. It was fun to go with a date. Had an appointment this morning with my psychiatrist Dr. ————. We decided to try a larger dose of medicine. Things are really looking better, but I am anxious to give it a try if it might work. He suggested I definitely stay on the medicine, at least at 20 mgs/day. I am going to bump it up to 40 mgs., and see what happens. I really like my doctor. He is a good man, and it was a pleasant experience to visit with him.

The most important counsel that he offered to me was that I seek for spiritual help in filling the existential vacuum that I have found myself in so much. He was very impressed at the depth of my understanding of the cognitive end of things, but

131 An indication of my natural proclivity toward Self-Action Research.
noticed that I am not as effective at my emotional, feeling side of things. Overall, it was a great visit.

Fortunately, I was able to remain on my parent’s insurance during this time, which kept my medication costs to a mere co-pay fee. One time, I was even able to inadvertently utilize my running skills to help me buy the medication, as the following entry explains.

**Saturday March 30, 2002**

Ran a 5k race this morning, and finished fourth overall. I ran 17:02, which wasn’t too bad for [only] having run about three times in the last six weeks. I was pleased, and got a ten-dollar gift certificate to Gap, which I traded with Jessie\(^{132}\) for her $10 certificate to Albertsons. I figured I could use it to purchase my next dosage of medication at the Albertsons pharmacy.

I do not recall exactly when I went off of my medication, but I was no longer taking it when I moved to Georgia in August 2003. After another melodramatic romantic rejection/crisis following my return to Utah six months later in February 2004, I again found myself in the grasp of nearly unbearable OCD symptoms, prompting me to return once again to both regular psychotherapy and medication.\(^{133}\) The following journal entries describe some of my experiences with this new round of therapy with a new counselor who, like my former counselor, was also female. I experienced more ups-and-downs with this counselor, who, despite her sincerity, but not as well suited for me personally as my previous counselor had been.

**May 10-16, 2004**

This week was hard. I have been quite depressed. Getting out of bed has been difficult. I have mostly wanted to lay flat on my back. I did run several times and am in the process of getting in shape for the Utah Games.

\(^{132}\) My younger sister.

\(^{133}\) This time I was prescribed Celexa (Citalopram) and Lexapro (Escitalopram). According to my journal entry of Monday, May 3, 2004, Lexapro is “a new drug that is close to the same thing [as Celexa], but allows you to get basically the same effect from a lesser dosage.”
[My waiter job] is wearing on me. As soon as I can quit that job I will. Joe suggested perhaps a job at a Motel in the evening where I could have time to just read. That appeals.

Had my second counseling appointment this Wednesday. It was good. I really like —— my counselor. I am extremely disillusioned right now. Don’t know when I will really come out of it.

**Mon-Thurs. May 17-20, 2004**

Hellish first couple of days. Hard to get out of bed. Very frustrated. Very miserable. Felt like dying—or had desires along the lines of wanting to cease to exist. …

Had a good therapy session on Thursday night. I like ———. She is a good therapist, but I think that my situation is stumping her as well to some degree. It is frustrating and I don’t know how much good is coming of it.

**Sun May 23, 2004**

Nice day. Had a few minutes to spend with ———, which was nice…. The last several days—ever since I had the counseling session with ———, things have really looked up. As frustrating as the counseling session itself was (in the sense that I didn’t feel like I was getting much of anywhere) it has coincided with a timing that has me going in the right direction mentally and psychologically in a big way.

I feel healthier and less uptight and filled with a heart that is open and forgiving and mature and seeing things again as they really are to an extent that I think the Sun is truly coming out again in my life. It is so fascinating to me how nothing really changes, but when I change internally, my world changes with it, and motivation and love and compassion, and all kinds of wonderful things begin to return.

**October 3, 2004**

Experienced a lot of anxiety today over ———. This is one of the worst days for that. It will only get better from here—I hope.

**October 4, 2004**

Was hard to do, but I knew it was the only road I could take—that I wanted to take—to pick myself up once again and keep moving forward. To keep trying—that is the highest of actions.
I resolve to humble myself regarding where I am at with relationships and the obsessive element in that part of my life. I am resolved and committed to going forward and resting not until God enables me through His grace and the fruit of my own efforts to conquer this maddening weakness and struggle just like I have conquered so many challenges in the past.

As I said to ——— my psychotherapist tonight…this weakness will bow to me.

Fri. Oct. 15, 2004

Another tough day physically and emotionally. Better emotionally though.

I had a therapy session with ——— this morning. I didn’t feel like I got much out of it. I am thinking about either terminating therapy soon, or else getting a different counselor. Bless ———‘s heart, but, I don’t think that I am getting much from her anymore. I am dubious whether she is a good fit for my needs. She does love and care about me though as a client and I appreciate that. It is nice to think that someone out there really does love and care about me and even thinks about me and how I am doing once in a while—not that my family isn’t a great support—because they are, but, at this point in my life, that is still different for me.

The last journal entry I can find that mentions this round of psychotherapy was April 12, 2005. Despite terminating this round of psychotherapy, I would continue on my medication134 until 2006, when I tapered off of it gradually until April, when I went off it completely.

In conjunction with this formal counseling, I also engaged my brother Joe as a lay psychotherapist for about four years following my mission. I had great respect for Joe, and just as importantly, viewed him as a sterling example of mental hygiene. When I comparing his counseling “services” to the professional (and semi-professional) counselors I have worked with to date, I can honestly say that Joe held his own, and his billing system was far kinder to my wallet.135 Particularly in 2001 and 2002, I regularly went to Joe either by phone or in person to talk through a given situation or scenario I

134 At this period of time, my psychiatrist switched my medication to Effexor (venlaxafine).
135 Although Joe repeatedly joked that he would “send me the bill.”
was having OCD struggles with. A skilled and patient listener, he was generous with his time and helpful with his counsel. I will always be grateful for the guidance and support he extended so liberally offered to me during those difficult years. My sister Jody also served as a lay therapist for me between 2001 and 2003, especially in relation to my troubles with dating and women.

After terminating therapy and medication in 2005-06, I remained aloof of both for five years. It would be nice to report that I did so because my OCD had been cured. It had not, and beginning in 2007, I began experiencing symptoms that were once again worthy of professional help. In 2008-09, it got even worse. The most prominent strain of OCD at this period of my life was by far the one that targeted issues surrounding existential frustration. I would arise in the morning quite depressed—almost to the point of wishing for non-existence—and it would often take many hours before I was able to snap out of my funk. This pattern was somewhat alleviated in 2009-2010. This was due in large part to being employed full-time as a high school teacher. While my year of in-classroom teaching was one of the most challenging136 of my life, I did enjoy several aspects of it, and my schedule was so busy that I did not have much mental time or energy to spare on existential ruminations.

In 2011, in the midst of my doctoral sabbatical, I lacked the kind of externally enforced, rigid schedule, I had experienced as a full-time teacher. Moreover, I was bearing through a winter in Newfoundland, Canada, which was cold, dark, snowy, and wet. I was also facing some other personal struggles, including the typical OCD-influenced existential frustration I had come to know so well. This disquieting

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136 Next to serving a full-time mission for my Church, that year of teaching high school was the most difficult single personal and/or professional challenge I have ever undertaken.
combination caused me to hit a threshold whereby I relented and finally returned to therapy and medication for the first time in five years. I entered counseling with a professional psychologist (Ph.D.), and attended approximately eight-ten sessions with her, most of which I found beneficial. Due to a lack of psychiatric professionals in the St. John’s area, it took a little while before I was able to get an appointment with one, but when I finally did, he started me off on Anafranil (Clomipramine) and then later switched me to Celexa (Citalopram) after I experienced meager results with the former, and, upon his request, had disclosed the fact that several of my family members (including myself) who had dealt with depression had responded well to Citalopram. I dealt with some negative side effects after starting Anafranil and Celexa; they included sexual side effects and lethargy. After I had been on Celexa for a few months, the lethargy subsided. The sexual side effects remained, inhibiting, but not precluding sexual activity.

When my wife and I returned to Houston, Texas from Canada, I was taking 30 milligrams of Celexa in the morning and 20 milligrams in the evening. I am currently (2013) taking 20 in morning and 20 in the evening. I considered the possibility of going “off” the medication several times in 2012, but ultimately decided to remain “on” it, at least until I reach a place in life that is more predictable and balanced than it presently is. In March 2013 my wife had a baby (our first child), I finished my doctoral degree, and we moved into a new home (our first). Although an exciting time, it gave new meaning to “March Madness” for us. Moreover, my career path is still in a place of scheduling and financial unpredictability. All told, I feel, and my psychiatrist agrees, that it is wise to not make any drastic changes in the near future. Furthermore, I have enjoyed such

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137 Ever since my positive experiences with my first female counselor at the Comprehensive Clinic, I have routinely preferred and requested female counselors.
success “on” the medication the past two years that it seems increasingly unnecessary to go “off” it in the foreseeable future. It really does take the edge off of the symptoms of both OCD and depression. As the old saying goes: If it ain’t broke; don’t fix it! During my period of ambivalence back in 2012, an interesting thing occurred that helped me to make my decision to stay “on” medication. I came across a journal entry from January 2006, the last time I was contemplating going off of medication.

**Mon. January 30, 2006**

Honestly, I do not feel very good about going off of [my medication] completely though because there have been a few incidents in the past week that horrifically resembled some of the hellish OCD experiences of the past and even a brief visit from a distance of such a [sic] egregious mental obstacle is enough to cause me to never go off the medication again.

I did end up going off of medication a few months later, and I did survive. Nevertheless, my decision was motivated in part by a shortage of financial resources. The financial component is not an issue this time around. Therefore, why take the risk if I do not have to? I answer my own question: “Good point, let’s keep things where they are at for a while.”

As the severity of my OCD symptoms have undulated over the years, the question arises: “How do I know when I need to re-enter therapy and/or return to medication?” Peck (1997) explained that, “people have frequently asked” (p. 76) him the same question. His answer?

*[You should enter therapy] When you’re stuck. There’s no need for therapy when you’re clearly growing well without it. But when [you]’re not growing, when [you]’re stuck and spinning [y]our wheels, [you]’re obviously in a condition of inefficiency. And whenever there’s a lack of efficiency there is a potentially unnecessary lack of competence [that therapy could potentially help]. (p. 76)*
I first read these words years ago, and to this day, this principle forms the litmus test I use in determining my own need, or lack thereof, for psychotherapy and/or pharmacotherapy.

**Self-Compassion**

In connection with self-awareness and self-discipline, self-compassion (Neff, 2011) was among my most important weapons in successfully batting OCD. I had to come to the realization that my OCD symptoms had often made me unduly hard on myself, and that if I did not better practice self-kindness, I would never be exonerated from the punitive effects of my mental disorder. Neff (2011) defines self-compassion as “entail[ing] three core components” (p. 41):

First, it requires **self-kindness**, that we be gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly critical and judgmental. Second, it requires recognition of our **common humanity**, feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering. Third, it requires **mindfulness**—that we hold our experience in balanced awareness, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it.

I found value in exercising all three of these components as I worked to manage my OCD. In the end, it proved to be one of the most important elements of my long-term progress.

**The Two-Edged Sword of OCD**

Chances are that if you, as the reader, have actually made it through this entire vignette about my experiences with OCD (Chapter Five), you probably feel a little sympathetic, perhaps even a little depressed after taking in so many details about my mental disorder, despite my success in overcoming it. For you then, beleaguered reader, I
offer an additional silver lining to the dark cloud of quasi-insanity that has loomed over this chapter.

At the conclusion of my mission in 2001, my mission president interviewed me for the final time. In the course of this, our last formal conversation together, he made a comment I’ll never forget. He said to me: “OCD has not been all bad for you Elder Jensen.” He then proceeded to list off a few characteristics of my missionary service that had likely been positively influenced by my obsessive tendencies (e.g. hard worker, obedient). My mission president was right; OCD has not been all bad for me. Indeed, it seems as though many of my greatest strength are rooted in my obsessive and/or compulsive tendencies. Many of my mental and intellectual capacities and achievements have arisen from my mind’s ability to move very quickly, focus in on a task, and take in large amounts of information and ponder deeply on important subjects for extended periods of time. On the other hand, my most profound weaknesses are also rooted in OCD. It has therefore played the role of a two-edged sword in my life. On the downside, it has the tendency of taking my personality to extremes. It also has the capacity to induce all sorts of misery in the form of stress, anxiety, guilt, and other negative emotions. On the upside, it has provided an extraordinary capacity for mental activity, focus, organization, and exertion that has led me to work very hard in an effort to be diligent, disciplined, determined, and persistent in overcoming adversity and achieving important goals I have set for myself. It has increased my desire for “getting it right” in numerous areas of my life; on the other hand, it has deeply heightened my sensitivity to “getting it wrong,” causing me much mental and emotional pain and suffering when I have “gotten it wrong” in those same areas of life. I do not view this as a bad thing,
however, as it has led me to make tremendous improvements in my life and become a better, smarter, and more mature person who makes fewer mistakes.

Much more will be shared in subsequent vignettes that further illustrate the positive components of OCD. In the final analysis, it does seem as though OCD is as much a gift as it is a curse. The ever-looming question then becomes, which will I choose to accept? Which side of this two-edged sword will I choose to keep sharp, and which side will I attempt to dull over time? Thank God for the freedom and self-sovereignty to answer such questions and make such decisions according to my own, independent will.

To use another metaphor, my OCD is like a young, green, passionate stallion (horse). Breaking and training such an unbridled creature is not easy or painless, but once you do, wonderful things can result; he or she may even become a champion. Viewed this way, the purpose of this Autoethnography is to study the process I proactively engaged in the ongoing attempt to “bridle” my own inner horse (OCD) through a “breaking” process whereby I have come to learn over long periods of time and many painful lessons how to accentuate the positive aspects of my OCD, while simultaneously eliminating, or at least diminishing the negative components thereof.

**A Two-Edged Sword**

OCD:
What has it done for me?
Is it my friend?
Or my enemy?
The answer,
You see,
Though I’ve
Oft been its slave—
Pathological knave!—

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Made me crave for the grave,
Yet somehow . . .
It managed to
Set me free!
Yes it does rather seem
That my nightmare extreme,
Sometimes guised as a dream—
And a good one forsooth!
For in truth,
I behold
That for brain hygiene’s gold,
I must work hard to mine,
Spending mountains of time,
Sweating tears as I pine,
Many years ere I find,
That the cure for my mind—
So oft plagued by the grind—
Is just like that gold,
Mixed betwixt all the old,
Common, cheap, rocky ore,
Whose plentiful store
Hides all worth
Worth pursuing,
Investing,
Accruing,
There’s no need for
Stewing,
For Freedom’s
Now
Mine,
And ever can be
Into eternity
If I’ll never
Forget
That the price
Involves sweat and
Avoiding regret,
And that I’m only set
When I see I’m not yet,
And then rightly perceive
That in time I’ll receive
A most pleasant reprieve
That’s as grand, I believe
As it badly began,
As if Alchemy’s claim
Held water—not sand.
So I’ll keep on the fight,
Through each day,
And each night,
With a calm, tranquil might,
That affirms I’m all right.
And ne’er e’er forgetting,
The puzzling piece
Of the pie
Peck\textsuperscript{139} calls
Grace—
So truly Amazing—
To see its pow’r
Razing
My mind’s ills
Erasing.
Yes, there’s help from my pills,
My shrink and S-L\textsuperscript{140} to boot,
But shoot!
What a pathetic hoot!
I would be
On my own,
All though I’m now full grown,
And have carefully sown
Seeds of thoughtful decision,
Crafting nobly a vision:
Important!
Yes all,
But lest I should fall,
I will never
Forget
The Source
That doth heal.
With salve that is real—
As real as You—
And me,
And OCD,
And the help,
And the cure—or
The management—
Here, and
Now,
As I await its ultimate
Eradication
THEN . . .

\textsuperscript{139} M. Scott Peck, M.D.
\textsuperscript{140} S-L refers to Self-Leadership.
By Him
As long as
I
Do
My
Part.

– Jordan Jensen

Another component of OCD’s two-edged nature is that as I have exercised Self-Leadership and otherwise sought to overcome my disorder, I have been blessed with the positive feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment associated with overcoming difficulties, setting and achieving goals, and experiencing self-growth in numerous life arenas. This has done wonders for my self-esteem and confidence. In the ongoing quest for meaning in my life, purpose and/or perfection is often spelled: P·R·O·G·E·S·S.

Progress\textsuperscript{141}

Alas, my inmost heart breaks free,
From all that has been stopping me,
And I exult in all that will,
Break forth into my life yet still.

There is still so much more to learn,
Things to achieve and things to earn,
Folks to meet—my heart doth burn—
As for it all I greatly yearn!

This anxious state amidst it all,
Oft seems to be my life’s true call,
Yet spite the pain and petty pelf,
I’ll still claim victory over self.

And meantime I’ll enjoy the ride,
And bask in the abundance here,
My life will be serene inside,
And outside I’ll be filled with cheer.

– Jordan Jensen

\textsuperscript{141} Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 149).
In the midst of my ongoing struggle with OCD over the years, I have also learned

the important variable that patience serves in the equation of PROGRESS.

**Learn to Labor and to Wait**¹⁴²,¹⁴³

If I can only sit and wait,
My fondest dreams will be as dust,
When I compare my actual fate,
My grandest hopes will be mere rust.

If I can only hold my horses,
Letting God’s might work through me,
I’ll master all required courses,
And sovereign of my world I’ll be.

There’s certain magic found in patience,
As I plod through life’s refining,
And though the wait costs years and months,
And often finds my soul repining.

Alas the prize for firm endurance,
Far outweighs the price tags smart,
There’s assurance at timely moments,
That God’s a Master of His scart.¹⁴⁴

Help us then with firm conviction,
Sojourning through the agony,
Separating fact from fiction,
Ever learning to be free.

– Jordan Jensen

**My Quest to Become Easy Going**

Another piece of advice my Mission President gave me at the end of my mission

was to *be good to myself*. People with OCD are typically not individuals who are in
danger of committing high crimes and misdemeanors, even though personal gaffes and

¹⁴³ Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 54).
¹⁴⁴ A hybrid word I invented to describe a perfect amalgamation between art and science.
other, more minor mistakes may feel commensurate thereto. Coming from a spiritual leader that I greatly respected, the advice to be good to myself has benefitted me enormously over the course of my journey working towards solutions to my OCD and depression. I have reflected back on this advice again and again, and it has done much to help me to relax and not be so hard on myself.

Over time, I have come to take great pride in the fact that I have become a much more relaxed and easy-going person than the overly intense person I have often been in the past. For example, one of my missionary companions nicknamed me “stress-bomb,” and my Mission President once remarked to me that, “you are never going to be an easy-going person, Elder Jensen.” He was not saying this to try and dam my potential in my own mind, but rather to emphasize that I am a strong person with a strong personality and that I was not necessarily destined to be what people consider to be easy going, and that that is okay. Nevertheless, I have to confess that I often view my Mission President’s prediction as one of my ultimate challenges with OCD. If I can become easy-going, then in one sense at least, I have really made it. To me, succeeding in this challenge does not have to translate into the relinquishment of my true personality, disposition or character, but the softening of some of my harder exterior personality traits (edges). In many ways, I feel as though I have succeeded tremendously in this regard, and take enormous pride in being a relatively easy-going person at this point in my life. I also glory in the fact that I seem to have an increasing capacity to help other people to stress less and be more relaxed in their own lives as well.
Good at OCD

Once, while in a counseling session at the Comprehensive Clinic in Provo, my second counselor surprised me one day by blurted out to me, somewhat spontaneously: “Jordan, you are really good at OCD!” At first, I was unsure of her meaning. She went on to explain that I am really good at becoming self-aware of my own mental status, identifying where I need to improve, and then doing something about it. This has turned out to be one of the more memorable and meaningful compliments of my life. I like the idea that I can be “good at OCD.” It means I have chosen to not become a victim; it means I can break free of my psychological shackles; it demonstrates that I possess power—personal power over challenges I face in my life; finally, it promotes the potential I have to accentuating the positive side of the two-edged monster-genius of OCD and/or depression.
Sometimes with One I Love  
By: Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I effuse unreturn’d love,  
But now I think there is no unreturn’d love, the pay is certain one way or another,  
(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not return’d,  
Yet out of that I have written these songs.)

It might seem strange to the reader to find a narrative vignette of my life experiences with romance in a scholarly dissertation—even if it is an autoethnographic study of my own life. I should therefore point out that this vignette is not really about romance so much as it is about failure. Yes, this vignette is mostly about failure, with one indispensible success story at the end.

In the words of Boss & Sims, Jr. (2008):

To live is to experience failure. There appears to be no way around it. Sooner or later, everyone fails. Some failures are small and private, such as indulging in a donut while on a self-imposed diet. Other failures are larger and more public, like flunking out of school…. All of us experience failure many times in our lives. Some fail miserably and get over it quickly, while others let it completely take over their lives. However, failure is not a permanent state, and there are action that can facilitate recovery. In particular, individuals who are adept at emotion regulation and Self-Leadership create their own opportunity to emerge from failure and return to an equilibrium state of recovery…. The emerging field … of … cognitive Self-Leadership [is a] critical element … along the path. (p. 135, 146)

In more ways than one, I am no Casanova. This vignette details the ways in which repeated failure in romance often exacerbated my obsessive-compulsive

145 Whitman, 1921, p. 112.
pathology, leading to some of the most profound psychological and emotional adversity and pain I’ve ever experienced. On the flipside, this pain likewise promoted some of the most focused, ambitious, and committed Self-Leadership work I’ve ever engaged in. In short, I feel as though I owe a sizable portion of my present Self-Leadership growth, development, efficacy, and life success in general, to the lessons I learned and the growth I experienced vis-à-vis romantic failure and disappointment. Correspondingly, I explain how these failures and disappointments, in concert with my efforts to transcend them, produced the all-important seed of success that grew into courting and marrying my wife, which is, in my opinion, the single greatest Self-Leadership achievement of my life.

**Falling Hard**

I am a romantic. My mother and father were both romantics, so I suppose that genetically, I got a double dose of the romance gene, and mimetically, I was taught by example to value romance. As a thirteen-year-old boy, I recall watching my father excitedly preparing a romantic ambience in a posh hotel suite for his and my mother’s 25th wedding anniversary; his actions left an indelible impression on my young mind. My father was also physically affectionate, both toward my mother and us children. Ironically, I remember my father and mother still sharing physical affection with each other right up to the time they separated (after 37 years).147 What an unusual phenomenon! While they obviously had their issues that led up to the divorce, romance and physical affection managed somehow to survive right up to the end. My father was

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146 Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798), the famed Italian playboy of the eighteenth century. While I may have been as deeply enamored by romance and the opposite sex as he, our shared dissimilarities included 1). My profound inability to woo successfully, and 2). My personal commitment to a strict code of sexual morality (i.e., I was a virgin when I got married).

147 They divorced a year later.
not a perfect husband, but he did teach his sons by example how to treat women with respect, love, and tenderness. My four older brothers, often like surrogate fathers\textsuperscript{148} to me, although also imperfect, provided me with similarly positive examples in their own dating—and later conjugal—relationships.

My first crush occurred when I was about four years old. The subject of my attraction was one of my first cousins, whom I planned on marrying someday; I even announced my intentions to my parents. This plan, of course, dissolved naturally over time as I learned about mores and laws concerning such things.

Beginning in kindergarten, ne’er a school year passed without my eye and/or heart’s affection falling upon some girl (or girls), and then later upon some woman (or women). Since kindergarten, I have virtually always had a crush on someone. From a tender age, my daydreams were many and varied regarding romance. My older brother Wayne was my first sibling to get married. His nuptials occurred when I was in 7th grade. Once, while talking with Wayne, he shared with me how excited he was to get married, and how he had daydreamed about what it would be like since he was just a boy. I could relate. As a seventh-grader, I was already daydreaming about marriage myself. Later on as a young man, I even began putting pen to paper, composing letters to my “future wife.” For three years, between September 7, 2003 and September 20, 2006, I wrote 64 letters filling 116 pages to an anonymous future spouse; 30 of them (62 pages) were handwritten. While these letters clearly evinced my passionate yearning for a romantic relationship, and the genuine tenderness I felt toward a future wife figure, they also, at

\textsuperscript{148} This was largely a result of the age gap between my four older brothers and me. The closest brother to me in age is eight years my elder; my oldest brother is twelve years my senior.
times, provided a window into the often immature perspectives that were symptoms of my deep insecurity.

Figure 91. Excerpts from a handwritten letter I wrote to my “future wife,” dated October 12, 2004.
As discussed in the previous vignette, my glory days as a ladies man came in fifth-grade. Before, and after, fifth grade, I was no longer the apple of the ladies’ eyes. Yet throughout junior high, high school, college, and beyond, I cannot remember a time when I found it difficult to “fall in love,” and when I would fall in love, I would usually fall fast—and hard. A cousin of mine once said to me: “You know, Jordan, I do not know what it is, but I have the hardest time falling in love!” I could not relate, not even in the slightest degree. It seemed I was always falling in love, and the falling usually occurred rapidly and regularly. I once penned a poem that aptly described these many and varied pre-conjugal “falling-in-love” experiences.

She Was

She was . . .

An angelic figure of embryonic divinity,
A guileless goddess of perfect pristinity,
My unmatch’ed match throughout all infinity . . .

This girl that I met just today.

– Jordan Jensen

I had the “falling in love” bug so badly that in one instance, I nearly fell in love with a girl I never even seen or met. I found her attractive simply by what other’s had said about her in conjunction with one lone phone conversation where I found her voice to be enchanting. Being thus aurally enamored, I expressed my feelings thus:

The Beauty of Her Voice

Although I’ve never seen her face,
Her voice is sweet as honey,
It speaks refinement and pure grace,
That can’t be bought with money.

149 Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 96) minus the apostrophe in the third line.
150 Previously unpublished.
'Tis 'mazing how her tone enchants
My soul and heart and mind,
The lovely sound for me implants
Hope that my eyes might find…

Her face and form and outer light
And with that meet and mingle;
To listen more, her voice so bright,
My ear for her is single!

Yes hope and words and inner spirit,
All proclaim her golden worth,
But when her sweet voice I hear it,
My ardent heart is filled with mirth!

– Jordan Jensen

Falling in love at “first sight,” was another of my romantic proclivities, as another, similar poem elucidates.

**Although I’ve Yet to Learn Your Name**

Although I’ve yet to learn your name,
Your picture casts a certain light,
That on my face a radiance rests,
A piece of heaven to my sight!

Amidst the throngs of girls I see,
All through our vicinity,
’Tis your face my eyes do fix,
And wish your heart and soul to see.

Oh how I wish that I could meet
Your mind and wit and all that be,
I shan’t refrain, but just entreat,
That you would smile back at me.

And if you do, you’ll ne’er regret,
And whether love or passion blooms,
You’ll gain a friend, who’s a poet,
And share in life’s odorless perfumes.

Hence this shall be my season’s goal,

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151 Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 95).
Yea, here’s a Christmas wish I jingle,
That with your gorgeous, lovely soul,
I yet shall meet and mingle!152

– Jordan Jensen

I loved everything related to romance: letter writing (including e-mail and text-messaging as I grew older), chick-flicks, flowers, holding hands, taking walks, flirting, thoughtful deeds, little notes, talking for hours in person or on the phone, saying “I love you,” kissing, and of course poetry; perhaps especially poetry, and with whatever prosodic powers I possessed, I penned (and/or typed) pages and pages on the subject. Moreover, my poetical Muse seemed nearest and dearest—and was the most liberal in granting me inspiration—whenever I was musing on the subject of beauty (outer, and especially inner) and romance. In my view, there is nothing quite so pleasing to the eye than a beautiful girl or woman, except for a beautiful girl or woman (or any girl or women, for that matter) who is also honest, true, modest, and good. In the words of Whittier:

A form more fair, a face more sweet,
Ne’er has it been my lot to meet;
And her modest answer and graceful air
Show her wise and good as she is fair.153

In my view, such a girl or woman is the personification of nobility. Moreover, such a woman was the kind of person I was ultimately looking for. In the words of Cary:

True worth is in being, not seeming,—
   In doing, each day that goes by,
Some little good—not in dreaming
   Of great things to do by and by.
For whatever men say in their blindness,
   And spite of the fancies of youth,

152 The phrase meet and mingle comes from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Love’s Philosophy (Weller, 1992, p. 66, line 7).
There’s nothing so [queenly] as kindness,  
And nothing so royal as truth.  

Aside from the sheer joy that romance—and poeticizing about it—spawned within me, I also perceived the quest of finding and courting a future marriage partner (my “Queen”) the single greatest Self-Leadership quest a young person could possibly embark upon, for what decision could be of greater lasting importance than the choice of a lifelong connubial partner? In my mind, there was only one greater single quest in all of life. Thus, from my early boyhood onward, I began preparing myself for this most important of goals. While still a boy, I began investing a great deal of thought into the kind of woman I wanted to someday marry. I also wrote much about it, including, of course, in versified forms. The clarity (as I viewed it) of my end goal did much to encourage the compositional process. Below is an example of one of my poems lauding feminine beauty (both inner and outer).

**The Soul’s Beauty**

Ah! The sight  
Of she so fair,  
Her lips, her face,  
Her fragranced air,  
Her fitly form,  
And soft smooth touch,  
Her silken hair,  
And other such…  
Hath stole my senses,  
Yet more sweet,  
Is when my soul  
With hers did meet,  
For while beauty fair ignites a fire,  
Soul’s goodness is my heart’s desire.  
That lasts beyond the external face,

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155 The quest to seek out the will of, and a relationship with, God, and then to successfully do His will.
156 Many of my journal writings focused on the inner and outer qualities I desired in a future spouse.
157 Previously unpublished.
To lifelong bliss and eternal grace.

– Jordan Jensen

**My Dating Record**

Despite my passion for romance, and the many and varied romantic notions of my youth, I found great difficulty in getting real romance to flower in my life. I went on my first date at age 16.

*Figure 92. Picture of me on my first date.*
It was the high school Homecoming Dance, September 1995.

According to my personal dating journal, between my 16th birthday and the day I got married (a span of 13 years), I went on 746 dates with 134 different girls (before my church mission) and women (after my mission). 526 of those dates were with one woman—my wife Lina—before we got married. Before Lina’s and my first date, I had been on 219 dates with 133 different girls/women. Among those girls/women, as well as some with whom I never got the opportunity to take out, I was rejected 130 times by 80
different girls/women. What exactly constitutes a “rejection,” you may ask? A rejection consists of one of the following two scenarios.

1). Asking a girl out and being rejected the first time.

2). Soliciting a second, third, fourth, et cetera date that gets turned down, thus terminating (of the woman’s volition) any chance for a further romantic relationship.

The vast majority of “rejections” I incurred were of the second kind. Most of the women I asked out acquiesced to at least one date, and more than a score agreed willingly to a follow-up date, and sometimes several. Hence, I did not always strike out the first time round, but until I met my wife, I almost always struck out eventually, meaning the women rejected and/or dumped me as opposed to me rejecting and/or dumping them.

**Pre-Mission Dating**

My church teaches that dating should be avoided entirely before age 16, and that exclusive dating should be postponed until after high school, or until the completion of one’s voluntary missionary service. I chose to follow this council, and have often prided myself on my circumspect obedience to this council. In the interest of full disclosure, however, I’d have to conjecture that at least part of the credit for this achievement may belong to the various romantic “crushes” who rejected my flirtatious overtures. While I was naturally an obedient sort of person to principle and council, I am still human; therefore, I consider it somewhat dubious that I would have followed this council as well.

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158 In my book, I reported these numbers as 123 times by 88 different girls (Jensen, 2005, p. 75). I went back over my journal list of rejections for this treatise and did a recount, which accounts for this minor deviation.

159 There were a few women who would have pursued a relationship with me if I had acquiesced to their desires. One could rightly say that I rejected these women, which is different than my own, personal “strike-out” scenarios as described above. Such scenarios, however, were rare compared to the other way around, which was the way it almost always played out for me.
as I did had I had a bona fide opportunity to date one of my crushes at least quasi-
exclusively. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending how you look at it), I never got
that chance because time-after-time one crush after another would end up crushing my
hopes for mutual romantic interest. Sure, I could get a girl to go out with me on a date,
and I did go on 40 dates before my mission, but getting a girl I liked to actually like me
back seemed impossible! Like the “no dating before age 16” standard, I did recognize
the wisdom in avoiding exclusive dating before my mission. I was, therefore—even at
the time—somewhat grateful that the girls were making it so easy for me to follow this
wise council of my Church leaders. Encouraged by life’s timing of these romantic
rejections, I sometimes even felt a sense of self-satisfaction and pride in my ability to
remain romantically free, unlatched, and unattached; however, the word “ability” as used
in this context is a rather self-aggrandizing term considering the “reality on the ground.”
Avoiding steady dating relationships certainly made it easier to focus on other things like
school (although I was not particularly focused on my school work anyway) and athletics.
As a senior, I even wrote a poem generalizing on the pathetic cycle I observed many of
my peers entangled in with their own teen infatuations. It was composed, of course, from
the conveniently smug perspective of a single person’s perch. In light of my many
romantic failures, I often encouraged myself by self-promoting the largely prideful notion
that I was somehow wiser and more superior to my weaker teen counterparts because I
was able to avoid stereotypical teen dating disasters.

The Cyclical Essence of Love in Adolescence

The cyclical essence,
Of love in adolescence,
Oft invades the presence,

Of an unsuspecting lot.
The always-foolish lad,
And the ever-clueless dame,
Deny that they are had,
By an ever-present game.
They feel quite enraptured,
By the person that has captured
Their heart, which soon has fractured,
That organ called the brain.
It all seems rather pleasant
While the epinephrine flows,
But the couple never dreameth
Where the madness often goes.
To the place it often ends: in heartache, ill and stew,
As they moan and grown and cry and howl,
All day and all night through,
Then firm resolves are plainly made
With anger at the wheel,
Before they turn and start again
To replay this whole spiel!

– Jordan Jensen

Despite this inner smugness, deep down I often felt disappointed, left out, and inadequate because I could never seem to get a girl I liked to return my affection. Twice I held hands with girls before my mission, but I never received a second opportunity with either girl. Despite my strong inclination to follow the counsel of my Church, I will admit there were a few girls I liked enough that I would have considered being their boyfriend, as least in a quasi-sense, if one of those girls would have been likewise inclined. It would have been nice to have gotten my first kiss before leaving on my mission, but none of the girls I liked seemed overtly inclined to provide me with an opportunity. Hence, I never “dated” anyone in high school. As heretofore mentioned, I did go on two score dates before my mission, and I have great memories from those dates, all but one of which were group dates, which hardly count as a dating relationship. The following vignette chronicles my experiences with one of the group dates I planned,
organized, and carried out with a group of friends and acquaintances. It provides some insight into what constituted my dating life in high school.

**Robin Hood Date**¹⁶¹

One date, which I refer to as “The Robin Hood Date,” was the granddaddy of all the dates my friends and I ever “produced” and “directed.” It involved 18 couples, supporting cast and crew, thematic code names, a power generator, a motorcycle, horses, costumes, bows and arrows, wooden swords, a wilderness journey and outdoor venue, a turkey feast, a dance, a bonfire, and many other particulars. It took roughly 100 hours of planning and preparation between my buddies and me. The following hand crafted letter (in my own handwriting) and subsequent typed letters were sent to all the females invited, and provides a taste of this carefully planned and themed group date.

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¹⁶¹ For footage of the Robin Hood Date (and other live footage of group dating practices typical of rural, American, LDS dating practices of the late 1990s), view the following YouTube clip, located at URL: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ei0qp0QPx4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ei0qp0QPx4) (Robin Hood footage contained between minutes 21:41 and 44:01.
"In merry England in the time of old, when good King Henry the Second ruled the land, there lived within the green glades of Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham Town, a famous outlaw whose name was Robin Hood. No archer ever lived that could speed a gray goose shaft with such skill and cunning as he, nor were there ever such yeomen as he, sevenscore merry men that roamed with him through the greenwood shades. Right merrily they dwelt within the depths of Sherwood Forest, suffering neither care nor want, but passing the time in merry games of archery or bouts of cudgel play, living upon the King's venison, washed down with draughts of ale of October brewing."

From The Prologue, "The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood" by Howard Pyle.
To Lady __________________________.

Rallies from our home where a noble oak spreads its branches wide in the depths of the greenwood shades of Sherwood. We, the merry men of Robin Hood, being stout of sinew and bold of heart, heretofore wish to extend our gratitude for your RSSL. We would like to congratulate you on your success in following our first set of instructions, and would like to officially extend a most warm and kind welcome to our rendezvous. We would like to thank you for RSSL-ing by the 27th, as we instructed. Your ability to follow directions in a punctual manner will help qualify you as being fit and able to follow the remainder of our instructions and make it safely to Sherwood for Robin’s Rendezvous.

We, the boldest yeoman in all of Merry England, feel it is a most extraordinary honor to have the likes of yourself in attendance at our merry gathering in ye woodland.

Loth Robin himself. “I walk along with a brisk step and a merry whistle to think of having the noblest and fairest bonny lasses in all of Nottingham Town at the reaches of our humble home.”

Now, before we give you the second set of instructions, we would like to once again extend a warning of caution. It is paramount that you follow all instructions with the most conscientious and mindful precision. It is quite important. Do you read me, it is quite important, so remember, when you read these notes, it is far more than just a fun thing to do, these are important instructions, that you must follow with complete exactness. We’ll wish to not tolerate any lackadaisical attitudes regarding obedience to our instructions. Things flow better with precise cooperation. Comprendre?

Now, for the second set of instructions.

Robin Rainsell, along with Will Scarlet will be braving the danger of Nottingham Town this Thursday. Yes, that’s right, they will leave Sherwood Forest in the early evening, and will arrive around the time that the sun begins its daily descent into its nightly death in the western horizon (sometime between 8:00 and 9:30 p.m.).

Robin and Will shall ride to the locale of your abode and with your key box, will quickly draw a grey goose shaft, and shoot it into the grassy area immediately in front of your home. If you have no grassy area, we will fling it by hand towards the doorstep. The arrow will contain further instructions for you to follow. The instructions will be attached in some way to the arrow. It is far too dangerous still for large groups of us to come into town at once, but in a twosome, we should be able to evade the Sheriff.

Furthermore, on the flanking of the arrow, you will find some numbers. These numbers are written in a special code, and contain the name of your escort. You will not be able to decode the numbers until a later date, but it is paramount that you keep the arrow safe with you, and guard it against possible thievery, or espionage. You will need it as a ticket to enter our hideout in Sherwood, and you will also need it to be matched up with your escort. We will provide decoders later.
We urge you to watch closely by your window during the time given for our arrival so that you may quickly retrieve the arrow and keep it safe from falling into enemy hands.

***Notice*** If, for reasons of employment or travel, or other prior scheduling conflicts, you cannot be by your window, watching closely, it is very important that you make the proper arrangements for the safe retrieval of your arrow by one of your near kinsman. We would be much displeased if arrangements were not made, and your arrow happened to fall into the hands of a littler brother, sister, or neighbor, and taken away to other adventures upon which the arrow could be lost from your possession forever.

Be strong of courage and noble of heart. We await your presence with great anticipation, and assure you that we have and will continue to put many stout hours of preparation, coupled with hard work to see that you not only make it to Sherwood, but have a most merry time as well.

Farewell, till you hear from us again, by way of a gray goose shaft, as the sun dies in the western sky.

Adventurously Yours,

[Signature]

Citation: Please note that the author of this letter, as well as the first note did not create all of the language contained therein. The fancy words and phrases, of which you are less accustomed to, are, more or less direct quotes from the book "The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood" by Howard Pyle. We wish to give Mr. Pyle credit where credit is due both in public and in private regarding the borrowed portions of his literature. This citation will apply throughout the date with everything that we do. So remember Mr. Pyle.

P.S. The order that we will go to your residence is as follows, so you can gauge just when you need to be by your window. This is in order from first to last, starting about 8:10 and going to 9:30.
To the Honorable Lady

Greetings from Sherwood. We trust that you safely received this note via Robin or Will a few days ago. We regret the loss of contact.

You didn't forget to watch by your window did you? We hope not. You are keeping your arrows safe, aren't you? We hope so.

Listed below are the final instructions; you will need to start your journey to meet us in Sherwood Forest.

On Saturday, August first, you need to be at the Blue Bear Inn no later than 6:30 in the afternoon. Please do not be late. When traveling to the Inn, there will be absolutely no horses, carriages, planes, cars, trucks, buses, bikes, or any form of public transportation. The only form of transportation allowed is a horse or a saddle. You are expected to arrive at the Inn with your own horse or saddle.

The Inn will provide you with food and lodging. You will need to bring your own bedding and personal items. You are expected to arrive at the Inn with your own food and water supply.

Upon arrival at the Inn, you will be greeted by Will andRobin. You will be guided to your room and shown around the Inn. You will be given instructions on how to find your way around the Inn and the surrounding area.

Please bring a change of clothes and a toothbrush. The Inn will provide you with soap and towels.

You will need to bring your own camera and film. The Inn will provide you with开发 film. You will need to bring your own camera and film. The Inn will provide you with development facilities.

You will need to bring your own map and compass. The Inn will provide you with a detailed map of the area and directions to the rendezvous.

Upon arrival at the rendezvous, you will be greeted by Robin and Will. You will be shown to your assigned location and given instructions on how to proceed.

You will need to bring your own map and compass. The Inn will provide you with development facilities.

The time is drawing near, so, until Saturday, we bid you farewell.

Sincerely,

P.S. If you cannot read the numbered code on your arrows, then here is your code again. Don't lose this code. You will need it with you to decipher the code name of your date on Saturday.
Figure 97. Rehearsing with my friend Phillip Francom (*Little John*) for our sword fight on the *Robin Hood* date. Picture included with the permission of Mr. Francom.

Figure 98. My friend Andy Taylor (*Will Scarlet*) was one of my right-hand men in the production of the *Robin Hood* Date. This is Andy on his horse the night we rode out to deliver the letters to the girls’ homes. Photo included with the permission of Mr. Taylor.
Figure 99. The Ladies on their way to “Sherwood Forest” (my Dad’s land) prior to the main production of the Robin Hood Date.

Figure 100. One of my “Merry Men” up in a tree filming the action.
Figure 101. One of the “Ladies” (LeiAnn Muhlestein Johnson) on the Robin Hood Date. Photo included with the permission of Mrs. Johnson.

Figure 102. Robin Hood, minus my hat and vest.
This group date, and other like them (e.g., *Mission Impossible, Trampoline Snow Cave, Firewood Fort*, and many others) created wonderful memories, and I do not regret having done them. We usually got rave reviews from the girls who went on our dates as far as creativity, originality, and fun was concerned. Nevertheless, I never seemed to make much ground in my goal to become popular with “the girls,” or to get a girl I liked to return the favor. No matter how hard I tried, the girls I liked would always end up liking someone else. Even my efforts to woo a particular gal through my Robin Hood escapades failed. It was deflating to my ego. Moreover, because of my OCD-influenced social reclusivity, I was not getting much experience communicating with, or otherwise interacting with girls on a typical, social level. It has been said that, “it is better to be respected than to be liked.” For planning all these dates, and other things, I may have earned the respect of many of the girls in the town, but I was utterly incapable of earning their affection.

At the time, I viewed the situation with no small degree of myopic egotism. I could not conceive at the time the extent to which my OCD made me socially “weird.” Despite this, I ironically managed to maintain an overinflated and arrogant view of my self. To me, I just couldn’t get why the girls wouldn’t all “want a piece of this” (meaning me). It was ridiculous, but it was my perceptual reality at the time. Years later, I came to better understand what the problem was. Aside from gaining self-awareness about my OCD, I was not exactly the Zac Efron of the late 1990s when it came to looks, nor was I related to any stars with the last name of Jonas or Bieber, as the following photo from my senior year painfully evinces.
After seeing this picture, it became cogently evident (at least from a cosmetic perspective) why the girls were not beating down my door in high school. In hindsight, it is no wonder to me that I had such trouble wooing the girls in high school. Between my high-strung, socially reclusive, OCD-laden personality (the main issue) and my painful lack of sex appeal (the minor issue), I didn’t have a lot going for me (outwardly speaking). Unable to see this at the time, I erroneously blamed my woes on those “clueless” girls who had no idea what they were missing out on. In reality, they probably
had a pretty accurate sense of what they were *missing* out on, and merely determined it was worth missing!

On my mission, I was proud of the fact that the only girl I was writing to was *my Mom*. I guess it was all part of the pride I sometimes felt in high school of being free, unlatched, and unattached. This meant I would not be distracted in my missionary efforts; it also meant that I could start out dating after my mission with a clean slate, as if I had dealt with a cluttered one beforehand!

**Post-Mission Dating**

Difficulties with romance continued after my mission. In fact, they got worse—to the point of becoming pathological in some instances—before they got better. This was due in large part to OCD symptoms working in concert with the retarded state of my social development, which, due to OCD, had been significantly “held-back” in junior high and high school. While I was now nearly 22 years old, I was probably more like about twelve or thirteen in some aspects of my social functioning as it related to girls.

Post mission dating posed a significant psychological shift for most returned missionaries. Pairing off and steady dating was now not only acceptable, it was encouraged. The goal, of course, was to fine the right woman, court her, and get married. It all sounds so nice and manageable when put in such terms. I had found great success by setting goals in athletics; I knew the same principle held truth in scholastics, business, and other personal ventures, and there was no question about my personal ambition, creativity, and willingness to work hard for something. Thus, I surmised, this relationship stuff, aside from being fun, should not prove overly difficult for me. This erroneous aggrandizement of my market stature in the dating field was further fueled by
comments I had heard from certain persons who, unaware of my OCD, personality quirks, and retarded social development, had surmised that I would be prized pickin’s among available Mormon bachelorettes. How wrong they were! In reality, the only females that I was really popular with after my mission were the mother’s of girl’s my age; yes; the mothers, and the fathers too! This, however, was nothing new. Parents of girls I liked almost always liked me more than their daughters did. Apparently they saw something in me that went beyond my lanky figure, average appearance, intense personality, and OCD-influenced behavioral quirks—which were much less apparent to adults than to my peers. As a result, I was virtually always liked, and was more comfortable around, adults than I was around my peers. The girls themselves understandably avoided me for all of these reasons, and probably others I may still be blind to.

When it came to my lanky figure, I worried a lot about lacking the physical traits necessary to interest an attractive female. It was not until after I got married that I came to the realization that physical appearance was not nearly as vital in a woman’s mind as I had believed. Unfortunately, certain negative experiences along the journey of adolescence had reinforced a suspicion to the contrary. For example, once on a group date in high school, one of the girls commented to the other girls how much she loved snuggling up to muscular guys at Friday night football games. Reflecting on my roughly 6’0” #135 pound frame (at the time), I was crushed! Afterwards, I licked my wounds with the solace I found in recognizing that my success as a middle-distance runner was largely a result of my lean muscled, lanky frame, but I never forgot what that girl said.
Her words, honestly spoken, became a symbol of lingering insecurity about my physique that would take me many years to transcend.

OCD had a tremendously deleterious effect on many of my relationships, but it had an exceptionally adverse effect on any attempted romantic relationships. Whether it was coming on too strong, being a poor listener, being too high-strung and intense, taking things too seriously, blowing things out of proportion, being unable to deal effectively with rejection, being too prideful, too arrogant, too impatient, too distant, saying and/or doing things that were socially awkward, not being able to take a hint (or stubbornly refusing to take a hint), or otherwise simply trying too hard, I failed again and again and again in my efforts to get a girlfriend. Ironically, and as absurd as it might sound to some, I was actually more mature when it came to male-female relationships in elementary school than I was in junior high, high school, college, and after college. It was as if I had developed and matured unusually quickly in elementary school, only to digress at the very point in my life when a normal person is expected to accelerate the process of social and emotional maturation. Furthermore, because I had not enjoyed many normal or highly functional social relationships with females, even of a platonic nature, since elementary school, I was not only terribly out of practice, awkward, and naïve, but I was also pathologically insecure.

**Pathological Disappointments and Heartbreaking Failures**

I was so insecure in college that I went through several extended periods of agonizing heartbreak over several different women over the course of several different years. This may not sound out of the ordinary until I add one essential detail: I had never even been the boyfriend of any of these women over whom I suffered so neurotically! As
pathetic as it sounds, these extended episodes of “despised love”\textsuperscript{162} account for some of the most severe and clinical OCD episodes of my entire life. For months at a time, I would become obsessively consumed with the excruciating ruminations of heartbreak over women with whom I had never even been in an exclusive relationship with, but had merely gone out with on a few dates—if that! Fortunately, I was not “sick in bed” or “in the hospital” during these periods. Rather, I continued on with my studies and life as best I could while suffering unrelentingly internally. While I went about my business with a semblance of stasis and normalcy on the outside, the storms taking place in my mind and heart and soul were excruciating. To illustrate, consider the following journal entries from three of these OCD-influenced heartbreaks with three different women at three different periods of time following my mission. I went out with all of these girls at least once, but never had an exclusive relationship with, or kissed.

\textbf{Woman 1}

Came home and saw ——— getting ready to go camping with some guys—I suppose. It killed me. Taking ———\textsuperscript{163} out was a bad idea, in the sense that it definitely has fanned the spark of relapse [for ———] into a flame again. I was steamy inside. I absolutely hate this—and yet I obsessively hold fast to it like a little child clinging to [his] blanket.

\textbf{Woman 2}

Today was a day from hell. I hit a breaking point. The obsession with ——— has become pathological, and I am really going through hell. I have allowed the pain of the situation [to] turn negative, and allow myself to look inwardly at myself in a negative light—convincing myself pretty much that my skinniness is a major contributing factor to the rejection issue…. I was in such turmoil over ——— and feeling such emptiness and loneliness and the like in my life right now. It was depressing to me that I couldn’t muster up enough passion for my major. I bore through a painful day at school, and then went to Jody’s and was thankful to be

\textsuperscript{162} Hamlet Act III, Scene I, Line 80 (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 129).

\textsuperscript{163} Different girl; a roommate of the girl I was suffering over.
able to talk. I cried a bit on the way, and I cried some more as I talked to [my sister] Jody [about it].

Woman 3

Rode the “White Rim” trail today in Canyonlands. I was a psychological basket case. Obsessed like crazy about ———. Ended up riding in the truck about thirty miles because I simply wasn’t up to it [the biking. I] had virtually no energy…. I easily could have done the whole thing had I been in better mental spirits.

Dad came along with his little white Toyota truck and served as our support vehicle. At one point while riding with him, I broke down in tears. I just lost it. I felt kind of ashamed … but, I just couldn’t help it. Bless Dad’s heart, he was very compassionate and understanding and reassured me that it was just fine to cry.

I got my emotions under control and the day went on. On the way home, Joe and I had another good talk that ended up again being rather heavy. Throughout the midst of our talk last night, my chat with Dad today in the truck, and with Joe again on the way home, it has become apparent that it would be wise to go back on the medication. I am going to do so.

I have been to psychotherapy for OCD on six different occasions in my life. Two of these six times were driven by OCD-influenced romantic heartbreak over a specific woman. I suppose nearly everyone experiences romantic heartbreak at least once in their life, but not everyone needs to go to counseling over it, or lets it unduly set the overriding tone of their lives for months on end, especially over relationships that were never even mutually committed dating relationships. My suffering was not normal. No matter how “normal” a self-leader might be psychologically and emotionally, romantic heartbreak will be difficult, but add clinical OCD and a decade-plus of underdeveloped social skills and conditioned insecurity in regards to romance, and my life was a profound nexus for neurosis.
The Paradox of my Insecurity

A great irony existed in my experiences with women and dating in that I was as confident as I was hypersensitive; I was as sure of myself as I was insecure. I was far from being afraid to talk to girls, nor was I socially reclusive in college and after. Between the end of my mission and the day I got married (7.5 years), I went on 706 dates with 101 different women. Most of those dates were with my future wife whom I spent lots of time with in the two years prior to our marriage, but 180 of those dates were with 100 other girls over the course of 5.5 years. This is an average of about one date every week-and-a-half. On the outside, I possessed an outer confidence and willingness to ask girls out as well as an atypical willingness to face typical social fears. Such courage enabled me to step out on many a limb and take unconventional risks to get to approach girls I wanted to go out with. For example, once I asked for a girl’s number at the gym. Despite my affront to established social mores in pursuing such a course, I was confident in my approach, and she obliged me. A few days later I took her out to a baseball game. It was fun, but she was not my type, nor was I hers, and this first date was also our last, without any ensuing emotional drama. On another occasion, I was eating lunch with my colleague and supervisor when a strikingly beautiful woman walked by. The three of us (all males) were all rubbernecking, and I especially so. Seeing an opportunity to Carpe Diem, and wishing to live without regrets,164 I gathered up all my courage for the attempt. I was dressed professionally and feeling confident; I also wanted to prove to myself that I could actually follow through on such an audacious move. I also knew if I failed to jump on this opportunity to try and create an opportunity where many people would never dream an opportunity even existed, I would regret it. Leaving my colleagues and lunch

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164 A fundamental rule—even a mantra—that I have come to live by as a self-leader.
behind, I pursued (almost chased) her down the hallway, made my approached, introduced myself, told her how beautiful I thought she was, and asked her if she would go out with me. Somewhat surprisingly, she was quite cheerful and congenial (perhaps flattered) and gave me her phone number. Success! We went out once. Like the physically winsome woman from the gym, however, she also turned out to not be my type (both girls owned 60 or more pairs of shoes\textsuperscript{165} and were far too self-absorbed to heighten my interest further), but it was a fun memory to go out with them both once, and I am glad I faced my fears to make the attempts.

**The Risk**\textsuperscript{166}

At once when in her eyes I gazed  
My heart did melt and I, amazed,  
Took joy to see her tender glance,  
I’m overjoyed I took the chance!

– Jordan Jensen

Even if I did get rejected, I never regretted the risks I took because I always learned—and became—something from trying. In the process, I created many wonderful memories through numerous interactions with many different women. Very few women would turn down my invitation for a first date. In the process of getting to know a lot of different women on first dates, I inevitably desired additional dates with many of them. Sometimes I was successful in getting a second, third, fourth, et cetera date, sometimes I was not. Almost 100% of the time, the woman rejected me. This means that every dating scenario I desired to see continue eventually ended by the woman cutting ties with

\textsuperscript{165} Sensing the “high-maintenance” nature of the first woman, I asked her how many of shoes she owned. She replied, I think somewhat proudly, that she owned 60. Noticing a similar personality pattern in the second woman, I asked her—just out of curiosity—(a little on-date Action Research) and was not surprised when she also had about that many pairs of footwear.

\textsuperscript{166} Reprinted in Jensen (2012, p. 103).
me. According to my personal records/journals, these rejections numbered 130 different occasions by 80 different women.\textsuperscript{167} What this means is that I was rejected from either going out with, going out with \textit{again}, or otherwise pursuing a relationship further 130 times by 80 different potential girlfriends. The disparity between the two numbers is illustrative of my penchant for persistence when I really liked a particular woman. Some rejected me five, six, seven, eight, nine, even ten times! You’d think that I would have taken a hint and moved on. Not always the case. Did the word “obsessive-compulsive” mean anything to me at all in this regard? Apparently not. Nevertheless, and despite the enormity of pain that accompanied these many rejections, I do not regret having made the effort because of what I learned. It was a painful learning and growth curve, but a necessary one.

\textbf{In Spite Of}\textsuperscript{168}

In spite of getting flat rejected,
Pure sweet thoughts still permeate,
Though I've often felt dejected,
Her face and form still satiate
My mind and heart and this I know,
That even if I never
Win the heart of her I like
Her beauty’ll still last forever.

– Jordan Jensen

On the other hand, sometimes my persistence really came back to burn me to the point that if I could have a “do-over,” I would not have been so persistent in some situations. One of my biggest problems was the perpetuation of my egotistical myopia from high school, which, for a while, got even worse in college. As embarrassing as it is

\textsuperscript{167} In my book, I reported these numbers as 123 times by 88 different girls (Jensen, 2005, p. 75). I went back over my journal list of rejections for this treatise and did a recount, which accounts for this minor deviation.

\textsuperscript{168} Previously unpublished.
to me now, I naively saw myself as “God’s gift to women.” As a result, I did not always respond very maturely to rejection. Such puerile responses led to my burning more bridges and developing fewer friendships. I also deluded myself to believe I was an above-average, perhaps even a gifted fast dancer, you know, something akin to an amateur Justin Timberlake or Usher—well, maybe not that good. Comically, I continued to harbor this delusion until after I met my wife-to-be. She eventually filled me in on the facts, and has never stopped reminding me of it since. According to her, all the “cheering” I had gotten at past dances was apparently more for my enthusiasm and energy than it was for my skill. Sadly, but truly, she was/is right! I am much better on my laptop than I am on the dance floor.

**The Cops Come Calling**

I also managed to really rub some women the wrong way. The most egregious example culminated one morning whereupon I was rudely awakened by a loud banging on my apartment door. To my great surprise and discombobulated dismay, it was a police officer flanked by a street-clothed investigator. They were on my doorstep on behalf of a woman I had been trying to persuade to date me, and her mother. Clearly, I had become overly obsessed with the idea of winning her over. In my stubborn determination, I had misread the verbal and nonverbal signs of rejection as being more playful (and potentially rescindable) than they really were. I was surprised because while she had turned me down repeatedly, to my memory she had never explicitly instructed me to *never* contact her again. I figured that if I was patient—and persistent—that she might eventually come around. I certainly considered her as being worth the time and repeated efforts I was investing. In her mind, she was communicating, “don’t contact me
anymore, period.” The problem was that I don’t remember her ever actually saying that. She did, however, keep turning me down for dates, and I continued to be clueless. A person with better mental hygiene and common sense would have figured out she was definitely not interested all on their own. Obviously, I was struggling sufficiently with both common sense and mental hygiene that I needed a crystal clear, explicit message void of any ambiguity, and boy did I get one! In my mind, she was still potentially ambivalent in her feelings; I had just not fully convinced her yet that I was worth her time. I was obviously overbearing in my approach, but I could not clearly see so at the time; I lacked the self-awareness of how my own behavior was coming across. I felt disappointed and frustrated by the situation generally, and when the cops showed up, I felt embarrassed and ashamed. Horrified that this seemingly innocuous (from my naïve perspective) situation had been so unexpectedly blown out of proportion in her mind, I genuinely felt bad. I held no malice towards the woman, nor had I ever intended to make her feel harassed. The fact, however, is that I had made her feel harassed. Though inadvertent done, what I had done was wrong. My heart and spirit were subdued and troubled over the issue, so much so that I wrote a letter of apology to the woman’s mother (since I was forbidden to contact the daughter again). After composing the letter, I asked a friend, a mutual acquaintance of the woman and I, to deliver it to her. In the letter, I sincerely apologized for making her daughter feel harassed and communicated that doing so was never my intent. I also assured her I would never again contact her daughter, a promise I have kept to this day. I regret that I had to learn some lessons the hard way, but I take consolation in the fact that I was able to eventually learn from them, even though my learning curve was long and drawn out in regards to romantic relationships.
How Embarrassing!

While the above described visit from the cops was the worst consequence of my post-juvenile jejunity in dating, there were plenty of other, less serious, occasions when I was clueless and/or terribly awkward. For example, because of the extremity of my OCD-influenced social awkwardness in high school followed by my mission (a veritable two-year dating moratorium), I had never been close enough to a girl romantically to get my first kiss. I had held girls’ hands before, but fortune had never smiled on me sufficiently to spawn any osculation. In fact, I graduated from college and turned 24-years old before I would finally get my first kiss. This fact made me feel awkward, even abnormal, and further fueled my negative self-image when it came to women. I was like the Mormon version of the 40-Year Old Virgin169; I was the 24-year old President of the V.L. Club.170

Prior to that glorious day when I finally lost my virgin lips, I made two other attempts to kiss a woman, both of which failed in a manner so embarrassing that I would rather not share the details. On at least two other occasions, I tried to show lesser affection than even a kiss, and was ultimately repulsed. To this day, I still shake my head in self-disgust and embarrassment just thinking about how terribly insecure, and what a bumbling idiot, I could be with women.

169 Reference to a 2005 movie of the same name starring Steve Carell.
170 “Virgin-lips Club.” A Mormon pop-cultural reference for someone who not yet had one’s first kiss.
Getting Professional Help

My return to psychotherapy as a college freshman, and my decision to undergo a comprehensive psychometric assessment and enter a prolonged regimen of psychotherapy for the first time was triggered primarily by an agonizing heartbreak by a woman who was not even my girlfriend. A similar scenario played out to drive me back into therapy three years later. These two periods of time marked the most active and long-standing intervals of formal psychotherapy in which I have ever been formally engaged. In other words, of the six times I have entered psychotherapy, pathological romantic rejection led me into the two most intense periods of treatment. I recorded many details of my therapy during these periods of time in personal journals. The following selected entries from my journals in college shed additional light on my OCD therapy as it related to the romantic struggles I was facing.

.............

I think I was very mature tonight. Spent some time w/ a girl named ——— tonight. She is a cute girl—I guess. I was proud of myself to be able to talk w/ her and strive to get closer to someone as my Psycho-therapist ——— has asked me to strive to do—to just try and get closer to people, in fact she even assigned me a few weeks ago to try to have an emotionally based conversation w/ a female. Am feeling good about myself today.

.............

Was a very busy, productive day. Had an excellent session of therapy with [my counselor]. She helped me to realize something very fundamentally true about myself—that I tend to stifle a lot of natural affection, and am cold a lot when I could be warmer—in relationships. It was a real enlightening bit of information. I am not going to go into a lot of detail tonight, but it was a very worthwhile session, and it helped me a lot. Ultimately what I came to find out about myself is that—much of my efforts at improving my social life and relationships with females has been quick fix—personality ethic\textsuperscript{171} approaches—and on the surface, I have done a lot of things right, but foundationally, I need to become warmer in

\textsuperscript{171} A concept I had learned from Covey (1989).
my very nature—or I should say, I need to begin to expose my true nature, instead of stifling it, and I need to share warmth with others. A great and monumental insight which will benefit me greatly.

I feel like the boy who stubbed his toe. It hurt too bad to laugh, but he was too big to cry.” This is the way I feel tonight, albeit I did shed one tear.

I have hit rock bottom with failure in finding success w/ girls/women, whatever. —— never called me, which honestly did not surprise me in the least bit, and I didn’t even expect such, so I went out on a limb and called and left a message of[ n] the answering machine of ———, one of ———’s ex-students from down in ———, asking her out for tomorrow night. I went into it lacking confidence, and was doubtful it would fly—I gained in hope when I came home in the afternoon and found a message she had called back. The same stupid cycle of getting hopes up, and having them dashed. At about 11:00 pm, she called, and told me she couldn’t go tomorrow. She said nothing of doing something another time, and she mentioned she was going to return my e-mails; that she thought were funny—so, which suggest the level of her interest is not high enough to reply. Well, strike 5,832. This on[e] really hurts, because it is very much threshold time w/ this whole issue. I’m madder than hell and I’m not going to take it any more, as the saying goes.

I am very immature socially, and I have failed time and time, and time again, and frankly, it is devastating to me.

There will be some big changes coming up soon in my approach to females. The approach will deal w/ working closely w/ my psychotherapist ———, and striving to inhibit the zealotry a bit. This really hurts. It stings kind of like ——— did. I am ultimately the one to blame—in one regard anyway, and there will be some changes made.

Today I had a session with ———, and it was wonderful to tell her all that has been happening with ———, I gained some valuable insights from her to keep in mind as I go through this experience. [My counselor] is wonderful. She is such a fantastic listener. She doesn’t say much, she mostly listens, and it is therapeutic to be in an atmosphere where I can be so completely listened to, with love and caring on their part. I was all smiles as I talked about ———. It was a powerful feeling in my heart as I felt the joy of this experience, and the joy of overcoming obsessive compulsive disorder—the sheer joy of really being able to look and say, you know, I am making progress in a major way.
The feeling that filled my heart as I came out of the session, and during it was powerful. What joy and fulfillment filled my heart. I can honestly say that the greatest feeling of achievement I have ever experienced has been in the process of the last five months, as I have had such noticeable improvement in my situation mentally.

Though nearly a decade (or more) has passed since such occasions in my life, I still cringe when I read about these disturbing realities of my former self. Without the significant alterations I made over the course of many years to my mindset and actions—and the success that eventually evolved from those self-changes—I don’t think I would have the stones to publicly retell such a pathetic story. Even years later, and after much success, it is hard to stomach that that was really me; but it was really me, and I had to face up to that reality if I ever hoped to change the way things were, and the way they would be. It was not the job of the women, or my external circumstances, or my luck to change; it was my job to change, and change I would.

**My Quest for Mrs. Right**

For many years after my mission, and in many areas of my life, I tended to ping-pong between moments of profound self-confidence and moments of pitiful self-diffidence, insecurity, and ambivalence about what I really wanted dating wise, and when. On the one hand, I dated a lot and was often fearless in pursuing romantic relationships. On the other hand, I was still failing miserably in convincing a woman I liked to be my girlfriend. There were some girls along the way that would have dated me steadily if I had consented, but I was not interested in dating those girls. It was getting anything to work out mutually that seemed like an *Impossible Dream*: romance was the windmill and I was Don Quixote.
When I returned from my mission, I was so far behind in my social development when it came to dating relationships that even if a woman I liked had agreed to date me, I would have lacked the mental hygiene to sustain a healthy dating relationship. Obsessively concerned about marriage while still figuring out the basics of dating relationships with women, all the while being deeply ambivalent about what I really wanted and when turned me into a walking contradiction that was indecisively neurotic to boot.

By the time I graduated from college in 2003, I had, since turning 16, been on 109 dates with 83 different girls. Sixty-nine (69) of those dates with 50 different girls had occurred in the roughly two-year period between returning from my mission and graduating from college. Yet in that time, I still had never had an official girlfriend, nor had I kissed a girl, or been kissed by a girl. “A college graduate who has never been kissed,” I thought to myself, “that’s ridiculous, and a little embarrassing as well.” The thing I wanted most kept eluding me, and my social and mental hygiene were complicit in the subterfuge. Not long after graduating from college, I finally got my first kiss. It was a wonderful day in my life! I was 24-years old, and had my family’s all-time record for longest-standing member of the “Virgin Lips (V.L.) Club” by a margin of over three years. Indeed, I had extended the record to the point of increasing personal chagrin and embarrassment over the years. While my religious and personal commitments to chastity before marriage remained in tact, I did feel a degree of social, cultural, and personal pressure to finally experience kissing. This wonderful event in my life released a huge monkey from off my back. It also led to my first exclusive dating relationship.

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172 All seven children and both parents had gotten their first kiss at least five years earlier in their lives than me.
which lasted for the lengthy period of one-week, after which my newly minted girlfriend dumped me as quickly and decisively as she had wanted to lock lips seven days previously. I was very disappointed. I liked the girl, and do not know what it is that changed her mind. To this day, I’m not sure exactly what it was that gave her cold feet, but such a scenario was not unfamiliar territory for me. Several women in the past had shown significant interest in me over the course a first conversation, or on a first date, and had communicated their desire to keep seeing me, only to get cold feet—never to be fully warmed again. Such occurrences were extremely discouraging because I was, and still am, unclear on what I could have done better or differently as a self-leader to avoid such 180-degree changes of mind. There were plenty of other situations where, with a little self-observation and examination (Neck & Man, 2010), I could reasonably see where I had personally screwed up and blown my chances. But there were many other times as I grew increasingly mentally, emotionally, and socially competent when I was really doing well and everything seemed to be going just peachy and then wham! “Never mind; I don’t like you after all, Jordan, even though I know I was totally into you during that conversation or on that date just yesterday.” No explanations, and very few hints as to why. Such rejections, which materialized for seemingly no concrete reason and after such pleasantly flirtatious teases, were particularly disillusioning to me because it seemed that even though I was getting better, my results were not. Alas, I had no other choice but to move on. Two years after just such an unexplainable occurrence, I actually asked one woman why. Why show so much interest in me only to bail decisively right when things seemed to be going great? I chronicled her response in a journal entry.

...............
I spent over an hour tonight talking on the phone to ——— the same ——— that I really liked over two years ago—and the same ——— who stopped returning my calls, something that was very painful for me.

It was a nice chat. I was easy going and it felt very comfortable talking to her. It even felt comfortable to ask her why she had stopped returning my calls back in the day. To my surprise, she claims that it was because she was intimidated by me and the quality of my family——which, indeed does look a bit Utopian and ideal from [an] outsider’s perspective.

Frankly, I don’t think that is the entire story for one second, but, I do think that she is telling the truth from at least one angle. As such, it was enlightening and just goes to show that you never really know what is going on in someone’s head.

……………

Three years after getting dumped by my first official girlfriend, I had been on many more dates with many more girls, but had yet to secure another girlfriend. In the intervening time, I had continued to take what I believed were intelligent and calculated risks to live and date “without regrets.” In many instances, I conducted myself very confidently. I discovered that I was especially successful at engaging in meaningful conversation while on a date. Sometimes I got a little cocky in what I felt I had to offer a woman in a relationship. Such arrogance sometimes got me into trouble, and had the consistently deleterious effect of terminating all future dating opportunities with a given woman. In effect, I was a bridge burner. Instead of developing genuine friendships, I often retreated completely once I knew that romance was out of the question. My older brother Joe once brought this point to my attention and made a suggestion. “Why don’t you focus on developing friendships instead of leaving a wake of destruction in your path?” he once queried me. While his language was colorful, his assessment was adroit; I had left a wake of destruction in my path, and in the process, had developed no real friendships with any women along the way.
While the police officer story is by far the most salient example of the social blunders I commit, there were many other, less egregious foibles I found myself falling into. Indeed, it can be rather difficult, even painful, to read many portions of my journals between the years 2001 and 2006 because it is so embarrassing to relive (even in my mind) the socially incompetent, egotistical, even ridiculous things I often thought, said, wrote, or did in my efforts to woo and win a winsome woman. I truly shake my head to think how clueless I was sometimes, and how un-self-aware I often was. It is so clear for me now that all I can say in retrospect is: “No wonder I had such trouble getting a girlfriend for so many years.” As with many of the missionaries I worked with on my mission, I likewise feel to say: “God bless all the women who had to put up with me over the years.” It was not the women’s fault that I was not succeeding in romantic relationships; it was my fault. The more I realized this, the more I became empowered to make positive changes to my own Self-Leadership, which, in time, led me to my ultimate success: marrying Lina Tucker for time and all eternity.

Looking back, there are three key adjustments/improvements I made to my own Self-Leadership that paved the way for this unprecedented success in my relationship with Lina. First, I was more patient, casual, relaxed, and normal, as my Grandmother had implicitly, but aptly taught me to be. Second, I responded to rejection more maturely. Third, I progressed in my career in an attractive manner, meaning I established an income for myself that was more commensurate with the financial demands of entering into a committed, lifelong relationship.

173 I was definitely more casual and relaxed in comparison to attempted romantic relationships with other girls. Despite this, one of Lina’s biggest issues with me early on in our relationship was how “formal” (e.g. serious, traditional, rigid) I was. Over time, as she accedes, I made, and have continued to make huge improvements in this area.
Dreams of Rejection

Leading up to Lina, and even beyond, I often struggled with painful dreams of romantic rejection in my sleep. Before Lina, I dreamed of other girls rejecting me. After I began to date Lina, the dreams shifted to Lina rejecting me. To this day (and I’ve been married nearly five years now), I still have dreams that Lina and I are dating and she breaks up with me. In those dreams, she never calls me back, and sometimes months go by (in the dream) before I wake up. I virtually always wake up before a resolution is reached, and I am grateful to regain my sentience and realize that my wife is there, and that she loves me.

Concerns (and some help) from Family Members

As I continued to work through my issues with romance, I was growing older, and as I did, members of my family began to worry about me. I remember my oldest brother Paul suggesting that maybe there was a reason that I was not finding more success with romance. The obvious implication was that I was doing something wrong. He was right; I often was doing something wrong. What he did not know was the extent to which I was constantly working on myself to improve my chances of finding success with romance.

My siblings, particularly Joe, Jody, and Jessie, also gave me advice from time-to-time. My siblings were not the intrusive types, so most of the time, this advice was solicited, as I valued their opinions, and knew I could glean wisdom from their knowledge and experiences relating to dating and romance. One time was particularly memorable because of the pain involved. I was on a road trip to Denver, Colorado for a family event, and I was in a car with my brother Joe and sister Jessie. Seeing an
opportunity to open up to them in hopes of learning something, I told them about some of my recent, embarrassing blunders with girls. It was painful to voice my foibles so openly. It was even more painful to hear them iterate how foolish I had been, and hear them articulate a better way. Nevertheless, I was determined to get their feedback regarding what I was doing wrong, and how I could improve in the future. Swallowing my pride and “eating crow” at such times proved difficult, but they were important steps to my future success.

Then there was my (late) Grandma Jensen (1919-2006). She and I were close, and I greatly enjoyed the time she and I were able to spend visiting in her later years. On one visit, the subject somehow turned to romance and dating. Her implicit concern for my dating woes and connubial prospects was disguised by a clever compliment. She said, “Jordan, you’ve just got to not let the girls know how smart you are.” She then added a sincere, albeit somewhat flippant, comment about how girls are often silly, and just want to have fun, et cetera. I knew my Grandma was intelligent, but this observation was epically adroit on her part. In a matter of two brief statements, she managed to creatively, and implicitly expose one of my glaring personal weaknesses while wrapping her feedback up in an explicit commendation of my intelligence. What a brilliant woman! While praising my brainpower, she managed to simultaneously slip in a surreptitious lesson (an essential one) in human relations. When she said that most girls are kind of silly and just want to have fun, what she was really trying to tell me is that I needed to relax, be more easy-going, and act more “normal” in my pursuit of a girlfriend. The lesson was not lost on me, although it would be a while before it would sink in sufficiently to start bringing me success. The essence of that lesson my Grandma taught
me that day changed my life, and started preparing me to meet and court Lina. My sweet
Grandmother died a mere three weeks prior to the day I met my future wife. Two years
later when we were married, we opened up a gift with a card from my late Grandmother
(she had it prepared it in advance of her death, well before Lina and I had even met). The
gift was a beautiful homemade quilt, the third or fourth quilt she had made for me over
the course of my lifetime. The card had a check in it for $1,000. What a magnanimous
woman; what a beloved Grandmother! What a conscientious, organized, prepared, and
loving self-leader! I have known few people as organized and self-reliant as my dear
Grandma Jensen, and I don’t think I’ve known anyone who was so prepared to die in
terms of being logistically prepared. She was quite a woman. I know she was smiling
down on me to see that her gentle advice had been heeded, rewarded, and now, finally,
consummated.

Grandma’s Love

Upon my bed two quilts are spread,
Reminding me of Grandma’s love,
And even though she now is dead,
Her Spirit smiles from up above.
While down below, her quilts they warm,
My heart inside safe from the storm
And aid in keeping memories fresh,
Of all she did while in the flesh,
For me she truly deeply cared,
And of her time and cash she shared,
She lived for family, then died,
To join those on the other side,
And wrap the circle up, complete,
A veritable heav’ly treat.
So when upon my quilts I rest,
Or cast my eyes upon their threads,
I think of she who loved me best,
And feel the love she downward sheds.

Lina Tucker

I met Lina when she was a sophomore in college studying mechanical engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) in Atlanta. We met at a weekend social event that was sponsored by the LDS Church. I found her interesting and attractive from the start, and true to form, fell in love within the week. If it had been entirely up to me, we would have been dating within the month, engaged within six months, and married within a year. Fat chance on that timeline! In reality, we did not first go out on our first date until almost six weeks after we met. It was another three-and-a-half months after that before she officially became my girlfriend. During this three-month period I suffered terrible symptoms of anxiety, insecurity, and fear of failure. Intense and pervasive, the anxiety took its toll. My appetite diminished significantly, and I lost 13
pounds. That fall, I was 6’2” and weighed 165 pounds, not exactly a portly figure of masculinity. By the end of the year (2006), I was down to 152. Scared to death of what might not happen, I was haunted by all of the romantic failure and rejection of the past. Often dreaming about romantic rejection, I would wake up with the unpleasant angst of dejection beating me down even further.

One day, I shared my thoughts, feelings, and concerns with a church leader in a private meeting. Sensing the depth of my mental and emotional turmoil in the matter, he thoughtfully directed me to Joaquin Miller’s poem, Columbus.

BEHIND him lay the gray Azores,
   Behind the Gates of Hercules ;
Before him not the ghost of shores ;
   Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said : “Now must we pray,
   For lo ! The very stars are gone,
Brave Adm’r’l, speak ; what shall I say ?”
   “Why, say : ‘Sail on ! sail on ! and on!’ ”

“My men grow mutinous day by day ;
   My men grow ghastly, wan and weak.”
The stout mate thought of home ; a spray
   Of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.
“What shall I say, brave Adm’r’l, say,
   If we sight naught but seas at dawn ?”
“Why, you shall say at break of day :
   ‘Sail on ! sail on ! sail on ! and on !’ ”

They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,
   Until at last the blanched mate said :
“Why, now not even God would know
   Should I and all my men fall dead.
These very winds forget their way,
   For God from these dread seas is gone.
Now speak, brave Adm’r’l, speak and say——“
   He said : ‘Sail on ! sail on ! and on !’ ”

They sailed. They sailed. Then spake the mate :
   “This mad sea shows his teeth tonight.
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
He lifts his teeth, as if to bite!
Brave Adm’ril, say but one good word:
What shall we do when hope is gone?"
The words leapt like a leaping sword:
“Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!”

Then pale and worn, he paced his deck,
And peered through darkness. Ah, that night
Of all dark nights! And then a speck—
A light! A light! At last a light!
It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!
It grew to be Time’s burst of dawn.
He gained a world; he gave that world
Its grandest lesson: “On! sail on!”175

Weak and wan though I felt inside, I took comfort in the words of the poem, despite the knowledge that my own unknown “shore” was still out of sight. In the meantime, my mind, heart, and spirit were being stretched to their limits. It was internally exhausting. It also impacted my physical vigor and energy. During this period of time, I did little physical exercise and found running (one of my life’s long-standing hobbies and passions) to largely be a chore. On some of the occasions before and during my dating relationship with Lina when I did get out running, I sometimes felt a sense of such lifeless lethargy that it was almost as if I was tottering along wearing a full-body suit weighted down by sand. It was very de-motivating. Pretty much a lifetime road racer, I basically halted all road-racing activities between the years 2006 (the year I met Lina) and 2008 (the year we got married).176

Nevertheless, I did not give up. Working patiently, but diligently, to win Lina’s heart, eventually—finally—I succeeded. For so many years I had held on in faith that someday I would find a great girl, be able to date her exclusively, and then marry her.

“Your day will come,” I would remind myself over and over again, as would others who

175 Reprinted from Miller (1912, p. 151-152).
176 Although I did run quite a bit on my own after getting engaged, and prior to our wedding in 2008.
cared for me. After literally scores and scores of failures, this time, I succeeded. It took a while, but four months after our first date, Lina and I started officially dating. I told her about my OCD before we started dating exclusively. Fearing that such news might end my chances with her, I was somewhat surprised when she didn’t budge over the news. Phew!

Things progressed gradually (much slower than I would have liked at the time) from there. It would be another 3-4 weeks before she felt comfortable saying “I Love You.” After three months, I was the first to bring up the “M” word. She was nowhere near ready to even consider such a topic of conversation, but it never scared her away from kissing me! After eight months of wonderful dating, she still did not feel ready to take the relationship to the next level, so she broke up with me. I was heartbroken, and terribly afraid that my mental and/or financial issues would prevent us from getting back together. Still, I did not give up. Fortunately, for me, the misery of the break-up was mutual, my efforts to rekindle the relationship paid off, and we got back together just two weeks later. We would break up once more the following January (2008), this time for only one week. We could not seem to stay apart, and I was so glad of it! Well aware of my long-held desires and long-term intentions in the relationship, Lina finally reciprocated in February 2008, and the wedding plans began. I officially proposed on March 22, 2008 at a romantic dinner at the Westin Hotel restaurant near the base of the King and Queen towers (“our spot”) in Atlanta, Georgia. We had a six-month engagement before tying the knot in Salt Lake City, Utah on August 8, 2008 (8-8-08) and have since lived happily ever after. Well, not really. In truth, there is no perfect relationship or marriage. Nevertheless, nearly five years and a beautiful baby boy later,
we are happily married and love each other more than we did on 8-8-08. Lina is my dearest and best friend in the whole world. She is exquisitely beautiful to me, and I genuinely adore her. After such an onerously lengthy wait, it is wonderful beyond description to enjoy a successful, mutually satisfying, romantic relationship in my life. Throughout all this wide World, there is nothing else quite like the wonder of having a beautiful woman whom I like actually like me back. It is wonderful to be a husband, and just as wonderful to be a father. My older brother Joe and his wife Julie once observed that I was better equipped with the skills required to be a successful husband than I was a successful dater. I think they were right, and now I am glad of it.

A key to success in my relationship with Lina was learning to be patient with the timing of things. I had a real patience problem in other potential dating opportunities. One of my closest friends once remarked to me: “Wow Jordan, it seems like when you like a girl, you are ready to schedule three or four dates right off the bat.” This friend, wise like my Grandma, had a way of offering a piece of constructive criticism implicitly, while giving the impression he was actually complimenting me. It worked. His tone was such that I initially viewed his comment as a compliment to what I viewed as my decisiveness, clarity of objective, and personal drive. Upon further reflection, however, I realized that what he was really trying to communicate was: “Wow, Jordan, you might find more success with dating if you did not approach it like long-term scheduling in your day planner, your class schedule, or a 5k race. This important lesson was not lost on me, and would prove essential in getting things to work out with Lina.

When we started dating, I was 27; she was 19. I used to make fun of one of my college roommates because he would date freshman girls (younger than 20). Now, here I
was, years after gibing my buddy for all his cradle thievery, and now I was doing the
same thing, only two or three times worse! My age was understandably a concern for
her. It was certainly a novelty to her three 19-year old roommates at Georgia Tech, who
clandestinely christened me with the descriptive moniker: “Mr. 27.”

At first, mostly because of my age, she was hesitant to date me at all, much less
seriously. But this time I was patient—unusually so. Instead of trying to take this social
situation/opportunity “by the horns,” and wrangle it to my liking, I began consciously
practicing patience, listening empathically, doing less talking, and other social skills
where I knew from self-observation and examination (Neck & Manz, 2010) that I was
weak. Each new social event provided another opportunity to practice. Fortunately, I
had already gotten a lot of practice over the years leading up to Lina, and it was not in
vain.

I had to be very patient in my pursuit of Lina because she was in a very different
place in her life than I was. She had recently broken up with her boyfriend and watched
him leave to Australia on an LDS church mission. She was having fun being single and
free. She was not looking for a serious relationship. I, on the other hand, was serious
about looking toward marriage.

On our first date toward the end of October 2006, she took me on a tour of
Georgia Tech’s campus and I bought her dinner. It went very well and we started e-
mailing each other back and forth regularly. I had already fallen in love with her a month
before our first date and was ready to make my feelings known. I sent her away to
Thanksgiving with a poem and note that made it quite clear. A few days later, she wrote
me back and said, among other things, “I'm glad that we're friends, and I'm not really looking for anything more.”¹⁷⁷

These were not easy words to read. Old habits tempted me to respond poorly and burn yet another bridge. After all, I was not interested in wasting time if she had no intention of testing the waters of a potential long-term relationship. Moreover, experience had taught me that “just friends” was synonymous with “bruised ego,” and unfortunately, my ego was sizable.

My pride was indeed hurt. I was also sincerely disappointed because I was already in love with this girl and the more I got to know her, the more I found myself caring for her. Nevertheless, she had communicated clearly where she was at, now it was up to me to decide whether I was going to take the high road, or burn another bridge. Fortunately, and somewhat uncharacteristically, this time I chose the high road. I was congenial in the composition of my e-mail reply, writing: “Thank you for communicating your desire to just be friends. I am glad to know that we are both on the same page about that.”¹⁷⁸ While I was not being 100% honest, I was being 100% appropriate, which, ironically, was an indication of progress on both counts.¹⁷⁹ If I surprised myself by how well I responded to my disappointment, I must have floored myself to actually back up my words with action, or in this case, inaction: I did not push the matter any further. In fact, I stopped sending her e-mails just to demonstrate by deed that my words had been sincere.

¹⁷⁷ Jensen (Personal Letters Archive, 2006).
¹⁷⁸ Jensen (Personal Letters Archive, 2006)
¹⁷⁹ I doubt my conscience would have permitted such an appropriate “lie” back in high school, or maybe even in college. I would have felt compelled to revise the language to make it more “honest.”
Six days later, to my surprise, Lina e-mailed me back. In her opening sentence she wrote, “Hey Jordan, It seems like I haven't talked to you in a while. How's it going?” While I was making some ground in my development of patience, I still knew what I wanted; I wanted to date Lina. I did not want to act like a close friend when I was really looking for something more. Doing so would have been disingenuous, insincere, and inauthentic. So, in my e-mail back, I aimed for casualness throughout, but added an invitation to go to a Christmas concert at the end of my missive. To my great shock, she accepted.

From that point on, I continued to be patiently persistent, and persistently patient. Over time, it paid off. Nearly three months later, I kissed Lina for the first time. It wasn’t awkward—well, at least not like my past experiences with osculation, or past attempts thereat—and she didn’t turn away; indeed, she seemed to like it as much as I did. For us, our first kiss signaled the beginning of an exclusive dating relationship. It was only the second exclusive relationship of my life, and the first to last more than a week!

I was still a long ways from convincing her to take an eternal chance on me, and in the meantime, I had to make progress in my career or else I would never be in a place where she would feel comfortable taking such a long-term chance on me. Up the point of dating Lina, I had faced many struggles and failures in my career, and not for any lack of ambition. As an independent speaker and writer, I had incorporated my own business in 2005. I had worked very hard, taken many risks, and achieved some success. Nevertheless, by the time I met Lina, my career trajectory was about 95% potential

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180 Jensen (Personal Letters Archive, 2006).
181 My career failures and subsequent successes are the subjects of the vignettes in Chapter Seven.
energy and 5% kinetic energy. About seven months into our dating relationship, however, I took on a new client whereby I was able to secure consistent work with regularly paid professional wages—a first for me. The third and last piece of the puzzle was now in place. I had learned to be normal (casual) enough in my dating life to not scare the woman off. I had learned to be patient, and was actually practicing it successfully. Third, my career had finally taken off. The only variable left was when Lina desired to move forward. Another five more months of dating passed. In the meantime, which was in part very mean indeed, Lina broke up with me twice. This time, fortune was in my favor, and both times, we mutually decided to get back together. Then, on February 2, Lina said the words I most hoped she would say: “Jordan, I think I want to marry you.” On March 22, I officially proposed; we were engaged!

**Figure 105.** Lina’s and my engagement photo, April 2008.
While I do not contend that my relational success with Lina was the sole result of Self-Leadership, it had a key role to play, and much of the hard work took place before I ever met her. I prepared to meet her *by working on myself*, which was where the problem had ultimately always *been*, and where the solution would ultimately always *be*. As it turned out, just as my Mission President had told me in our last interview together, OCD wasn’t all bad for me, especially once I got the troubling elements ironed out. For example, Lina later told me that one of the things that attracted her most to me was my willingness to focus on and pursue something I really wanted, which in this case, happened to be a relationship with *her*. She was attracted to the fact that I was willing to work so hard for something that was important to me.

Finally: FINALLY! Romance had worked out for me. In an earlier journal entry, I likened my feelings of romantic disappointment and rejection to a sentiment once made by Abraham Lincoln upon losing a political election: *I feel like the boy who stubbed his toe; it hurts too bad to laugh, but I am too big to cry*. So many times I had felt a similar smart of my inmost heart as I struggled through the jungles of relationship building. This time, I likened my feelings of personal gratification and success to the words of a narrator chronicling his awe-inspiring victory in 1860, which had come after so many failures of his own: *This time, Abe won!*^182

This time, Jordan won. My “most rewarding quest”^183 to date in my life had been successfully sealed with a victory that was oh, so sweet.

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^182 Both Abe’s sentiment of loss and this quoted phrase of the narrator come from the read-along book and corresponding audio cassette entitled *The Power of Trying Again: The Story of Abraham Lincoln*, one of the multi-volume biographical series known as *Power Tales* (no longer in print).

^183 See line 13 of Sonnet 1 (*Unveils Far More*).
Sonnet 1

Unveils Far More

The pure unsullied sweetness in her face,
Unveils far more than just mere pulchritude,
Her every movement filled with perfect grace,
Hides inner beauty most have never viewed.
The eye itself so poorly judges light,
And oft ensnares mere senses in its grasp,
Rewarding far too much on simple sight,
Ignoring all that’s held in a soul’s clasp.
But when her inward majesty’s revealed,
To one who recognizes Godly grace,
’Tis like a vision of a pure gold field,
Enriching outer beauty in her face.
   Alas, my most rewarding quest shall be:
   To find her grace and share eternity.

– Jordan Jensen

Marrying Lina has been everything I had reasonably hoped it would be and more.

We do not have a perfect marriage. No one does, but as imperfect as this world is, and as imperfect as I still am, it is about as perfect as I could hope for. Lina is much more than a roommate, a lover, or even a life-long partner. She is my dearest friend, my closest companion and counselor, and my favorite person in the world. Our conjugal relationship is among the four most prized possessions of my life, the other three being life itself, my freedom to choose, and my relationship with and duty to God. The story of my marriage to Lina has been catalytic in the creation of my own personal Happily Ever After. The following sonnet frames the ethereal beneficence resulting from this station of most fortuitous regality, which has now become a most powerful reality in the presence of my own mortality.

A cornocopic concatenation
Was triggered for me one fine Georgia fall,
Ushering in a delayed elation,
Catharting some former ingested gall.
What was it? Power, or money, or fame?
No! It was a matter far more long lasting,
A subject summed up in but one word: dame,
A friend who could help bring life everlasting,
And oh! What wonder it brought to my world,
So poignantly contrasting times of yore,
An unbroken streak of fortune unfurled,
Unlatching at last the lock to that door!

Browning\textsuperscript{186} made his point; and did so quite well,
My life’s now been kissed,\textsuperscript{187} as I’m here to tell.

\textit{– Jordan Jensen}

\textsuperscript{185} Reprinted from Jensen (2012, p. 116).
\textsuperscript{186} Robert Browning.
\textsuperscript{187} An allusion to Browning’s poem, \textit{Summum Bonum}. 
Figure 106. Lina’s and my wedding day in Salt Lake City, UT on 8-8-08.
Finding Value in Rejection

In hindsight, I owe much for the rise of my own personal Self-Leadership Efficacy to the opportunities I had to learn, grow, stretch, and quite frankly, to suffer, through the many romantic rejections I encountered. Tony Robbins once said that, “when we succeed we tend to party, but when we fail, we tend to ponder.”188 Being rejected was never fun, but it provided me with manifold opportunities to take a close look at myself whereby I was able to better identify where I was a part of the problem. In short, it provided me with continual opportunities to improve myself. It took a while for me to be worthy of a self-leader as remarkable as Lina, but over time, I was able to transcend my former puerile self sufficiently to win the heart of an incredible person I deeply love, admire, and respect. In the last analysis, all the frustration, disappointment, hurt, and wait was worth it—eternally worth it.

188 On one of his Unlimited Power audiocassette tapes.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Vignette Three: Career Crucibles

Rough-Hewn Beginnings

Hill (1960) remarked that, “all who succeed in life get off to a bad start, and pass through many heartbreaking struggles before they ‘arrive’” (p. 39). My life has been no exception to Hill’s assessment of success. Vignette three is the story of my own “bad start,” and the Self-Leadership influenced successes that have, phoenix-like, risen out of the ashes of that bad start. I certainly do not consider myself at this point in time to have “arrived,” in terms of my career. I am actually still in the early stages thereof. I do, however, find myself in a very different position career-wise as I compose this vignette than I did when I first began sowing the seeds of a career in the Pedagogy of Personal Leadership.

A Stint in Retail Sales

Immediately (literally the next day) following the completion of my undergraduate degree in July 2003, I moved from Utah to Georgia. With the exception of a mutual fund that had grown (since 1998) to approximately $3,500 (which I intended not to touch unless absolutely necessary), I had virtually no money and no immediate prospects for work in the midst of a national recession. Moving in with my cousins, I worked part-time in their home-run software business, and then eventually found work as a retail salesperson at a FranklinCovey store in the mall. I despised retail sales; not quite as much as I abhorred direct sales, but it was definitely not a good fit for me.
Psychologically, the job felt like a prison sentence, and the end of each shift felt like
cashing in a “get-out-of-jail-free” card.

**First Shot at Public Speaking**

At this same time, I began flirting with the idea of becoming an entrepreneurial
writer and public speaker on personal leadership and other related subjects. The idea led
to the development of a seminar on personal leadership for high school students. Then,
through an acquaintance, I found an opportunity to deliver my seminar for the first two
times at Lassiter High School in Marietta, Georgia, in the fall of 2003. Lassiter was
giving me a trial run with a couple of student groups to see if they wanted me to speak to
more of their students. It was a great experience for me, and it was excellent experience
to get my first two seminars under my belt; however, they did not invite me back.

**Broke, and Heart Broke**

After six months, I was financially broke. I had to retrieve what little savings I
had from my mutual fund just to move back to Utah, get on my feet, and pay my bills.
All of the personal savings I had been growing interest on during my mission and college
years was soon gone.

Around this same time, I was also dealing with a devastating romantic
disappointment. My response to this letdown was sufficiently pathological that it drove
me to re-enter psychotherapy and go back on medication. As with former dating
disappointments, the social-romantic letdown itself wasn’t the primary issue. It was
merely a trigger that painfully exposed the extent of my insecure position (financially,
psychologically, and relationally) at the time. My immature reaction to the failed
romance further fueled the fire of what would become, for a period of time, an overwhelming series of obsessive ruminations about the woman, my failure to attract her, and what it all spelled out about my present situation. Looking back, it was as plain as day that there was no authentic chemistry between us, but I was so desperate for romantic acceptance at the time, I was unable to extract much salve from the fact.

**Desperation, and Temp Work**

At this point, my personal funds were almost entirely depleted. Desperate for work, I was ready to jump at any employment I could find. Shortly after signing up with a temporary work agency, I received a two-day position at the *NuSkin* distribution plant in downtown Provo, Utah, where I packaged orders on an assembly line. The bitter venom of arrogance enflamed by failure coursed through my veins as I boxed up lotions and shampoos, vitamins and gels over and over and over again. In hindsight, this—and other events like it—was a great blessing in disguise. I was being humbled, and that was precisely what I needed at the time.

**A Turn at Table Serving**

Temp-jobs were relatively few and far between. In the meantime, I was proactively searching for other employment. I eventually landed a job as a server at a Mexican restaurant through a connection with my cousin, who had also worked there. I would be paid a little over two dollars per hour plus tips. After my first few days, I went to visit some friends and a girl at the apartment complex I would soon be moving into. When I had finished my visits and returned to my car, it was gone! I had parked in a large open area with no cars that was technically a no-parking zone. I figured my
chances of getting towed were small; I was wrong. It cost me $110 to reclaim my vehicle. Still in my server’s uniform from the day’s shift at the restaurant, I was forced to relinquish nearly every dime I had earned in tips my first three days on the job.

I was, at best, an average server. I came to respect the position greatly as I realized what a multi-tasking monstrosity it was. I was excellent at focusing on a task or project and working hard to pursue it; I was not so good at multi-tasking the minutia of such a detailed oriented job. This proved problematic as a server. Whether it was a forgotten straw, a mixed-up order, or a dropped plate of food, I seemed to consistently make more errors than any of my colleagues. I lasted less then two months before giving my manager my two-weeks notice. While I cannot prove it, I’m confident he breathed a sigh of relief at receiving my resignation.

The Leadership Center

About three weeks after taking the job at the Mexican restaurant, I landed another job as an assistant to the director of the Leadership Center at Utah Valley State College (UVSC; my alma mater). This arose from my search for employment at UVSC’s Employment Center. Through this resource, I learned that Dr. Bruce Jackson had recently become the new Director of The Center for the Advancement of Leadership in the Business School at UVSC. I knew Bruce. My brothers and I had built shelves for him in his garage a few years earlier. I admired his education, personality, and

189 To this day, I respect the work of table servers and am always grateful I do not have their job, which is not easy!
190 I dropped two plates of food while working at the restaurant. One time it was even right in front of the customer. She was not happy. I was terribly embarrassed. In the few months I was there, I do not remember a single colleague making such a dreadful error, while I made two!
191 Now Utah Valley University.
192 Bruce has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge that has led him to pursue and earn advanced degrees from Boston University (Masters), The University of Minnesota (MBA), Fielding Graduate University
professional interests in human and organizational development.\textsuperscript{193} He was energetic, visionary, and driven. I knew I wanted to work for him. Grooming myself to perfection and donning my best suit, I solicited an opportunity to meet with Bruce in his office. After learning more about his work at the Leadership Center, I confidently attempted to “sell” him on what I could do for him. I painted a vision of how I could help him achieve his goals and make his job easier. He was sold. They had been considering opening up a position soon anyway; I had given them a reason to accelerate the process. Because of the bureaucratic formalities required to create such a position, it was indeed a process wherein other applicants were to be given a fair shot at the position. Among these other applicants was another outstanding candidate that I knew Bruce was impressed with. It even seemed like he may have been a little partial to the other guy. Between the extended administrative process required to fill the position, and this newly sprung competition thereto, I became discouraged, and I began having second thoughts about continuing my pursuit of the opportunity. Fortunately, and to my everlasting gratitude,\textsuperscript{194} my older brother Joe (my informal psychotherapist) wisely steered me away from such a move, as the following journal entry describes.

\textbf{Wed. April 14, 2004}

Today was really challenging. I decided this morning after giving it some thought that I would withdraw my application from the UVSC job with Bruce Jackson. I won’t go into the details here because I just don’t feel like doing so. In my mind, it seemed the right things to do—and in its place, I would continue to work on my seminar and try to launch it entrepreneurially—as well as work temp jobs.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[(Masters and Ph.D.)], and \textit{Harvard University} (MPA). A World traveler, he has spent time in scores of countries all over the Globe.
\item[Dr. Jackson received his Ph.D. from Fielding Graduate Universities’ school of Human and Organizational Development (HOD). It was through Bruce that I learned about the Fielding opportunity.]
\item[My work at the Leadership Center and my association with Dr. Jackson proved to be a springboard into every important development in my career since, including my entrance into Fielding’s Doctoral program.]
\end{itemize}
Joe called me just as they let me off of work—and I told him what I had done. He was disappointed and worried. I realized as soon as I talked to him that I might have made a mistake. I was tempted to take the prideful route and stick to my decision, even though reflecting back to the blessing Troy gave me which encouraged me to “remember the good common sense of my brothers and sisters,” I decided that Joe’s call was likely a sign that I ought to not withdraw the application. I was confident enough that I had made a mistake on my own judgment that I simply called Bruce back and asked him if I could change my mind or if it was too late. He said that it was still okay to change my mind. I did. I went straight to UVSC and got a copy of my transcript and took it to ——— so that my application could go through.

I called Joe back and thanked Him for calling me, and that it had led me to change my decision. He said that it had been nagging at him to call me [he didn’t know why]. The timing was impeccable. I personally think that God used Joe as an angel to save me from myself today. I suppose time will tell.

Bruce ended up liking the other guy and me enough to hire both of us as his co-assistants. Our pay was a paltry $7.72 per hour with a cap of 30 hours per week—hardly the wages of a college graduate. I took the job, however, because I perceived the opportunity as being worth its weight in gold, regardless of its present, penurious compensation. Time would vindicate my decision to be a wise one. In the meantime, I could work multiple jobs if necessary to make ends meet. Bruce’s co-assistant and I ended up with a shared office and later offices of our own in the Woodbury Business School at UVSC. We felt pretty cool having our own offices with our own keys, furniture, computers, and other office supplies, personalized business cards, even name plaques mounted on the wall next to our office doors. We also ended up rooming together that fall in an apartment near our offices. My colleague at the Leadership Center was one of many different room and/or housemates (50) I had throughout my many moves and experiences after high school and prior to getting married. Working with Dr. Jackson was one of the great professional experiences, opportunities, and adventures of 195 For a short time after being hired at the Leadership Center, I continued my work as a server at the Mexican restaurant. I also continued to work part-time with my brothers in their shelving business.
my life. Just being in his presence was inspiring to me, and he did his preaching by example. To illustrate, one day Bruce, flanked by my colleague and I who were walking briskly to keep up with him, was giving us some instruction on this or that when all of a sudden he interrupted himself by declaring, “okay boys, it is time for me to sweat.” We knew what he meant, and proceeded to follow him to the physical education portion of the campus. After a quick change of clothes, Bruce mounted the treadmill. With my colleague and I both sitting sedentarily off to either side of him, he continued to instruct us. What a boss! What an example! What a mentor! My experiences at the Leadership Center proved foundationally beneficial to many of the experiences I would soon have in my life. Aside from the chance to observe a remarkable mentor in action every day, I would also gain opportunities to meet and/or mingle with many impressive leaders from throughout the region. Such leaders included Jon Huntsman Jr., the former U.S. ambassador to China and 2012 Republican Presidential candidate. At the time, he was campaigning for the governorship of the State of Utah, a race he eventually won. On another occasion, I sought out an opportunity to go to lunch with the president of the college (William A. Sederburg). Accepting my invitation, President Sederburg gracefully picked up the tab after a wonderful meal and discussion about the Leadership Center and other matters. I also got to meet Thurl Bailey, a former NBA basketball player, the musician Alex Boyé, and numerous other high profile community members and/or leaders. My most memorable meeting occurred during our annual leadership conference where I was given the enviable task of personally escorting the stunningly gorgeous Sharlene Wells Hawkes (1985 Miss America) during the conference. Although I did my best to act professionally and hide it, I definitely had a Hollywood crush on Mrs.
Hawkes that day. I thought she was as pretty in 2004 as she was in 1985, and perhaps even more so if one takes into account the rather infelicitous hairstyles of the 1980s. A remarkably elegant woman, she was also one of the friendliest and most cheerful people I had ever met. A compelling modesty and authenticity also came through in the genuine interest she showed toward me, the lowly assistant to the director of the Leadership Center. It was quite an experience for a lowly lad who could not even seem to get a woman he liked to date him steadily at the time.
DON’T JUST STAND THERE
BE A LEADER
THE UTAH VALLEY STATE COLLEGE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PRESENTS THE 5TH ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE TUESDAY, OCT. 5, 2004 – 8:45 AM-1 PM MCKAY EVENTS CENTER – UTAH VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

THURL BAILEY  ECLIPSE  SHARLENE HAWKES

Figure 107. One side of the Leadership Conference program.
Because my wages and work hours were limited at the Leadership Center, I was still desperate for cash, and continued to eagerly seek out other ways to make ends meet.
For example, I went back to work part-time helping my brothers build shelves in people’s garages and basements throughout the community. I also got a few extra bucks laboring at $10 per hour hauling rocks and performing other landscaping chores for Dr. Jackson and his wife.

**Temporary Blue-Collar Entrepreneur**

The temporary work I did for Dr. Jackson and his wife gave me an idea. Perhaps I could advertise my services as a yard worker. I pursued this idea by designing, printing, and then running several hundred of my own fliers. Bereft of my own yard tools, I employed the slogan, *Your Tools, My Muscles.*

![Figure 109. My yard-working flyer.](image)
I distributed several hundred of these fliers in local neighborhoods, but received only one job from my efforts. Actually, I gained two jobs, but one was for a family member who needed some yard work done and must have also felt sorry for me.

**Watering the Seeds of My Seminars**

Earlier that year, I also began working again on the personal leadership seminar I had first delivered at Lassiter High School back in Georgia the previous year. I found the work unusually engaging and exciting. I felt like it was what I was born to do. The problem is that it presently paid me nothing. Nevertheless, by the end of the year (2005), I had taught 13 more pro bono seminars at five different locations around the State of Utah. The feedback from seminar attendees positively reinforced in my mind both the value of, and general interest in, the message I was sharing.

**Network Marketing/Direct Sales**

Despite my failure as a Cutco Cutlery salesman back in high school, a very short-lived (1-day) position in sales in Atlanta, my distasteful experiences in retail, and my aversion to sales in general, I amazingly attempted to court the industry once again after returning to Utah. This time around, I pursued a network marketing opportunity as a direct sales representative of Pre-Paid Legal (now Legal Shield). One might think I would have already learned my lesson about sales, but as a self-leader, I remained convinced that I had to “pay my dues” to be successful, and figured that facing the kind of work that was most distasteful to me seemed to me a perfect way to pay them.\(^{196}\)

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\(^{196}\) The notion that diligently performing distasteful work invited good Karma (i.e., God’s favor) was an idea in which I placed significant stock. While I no doubt benefitted from a willingness to do whatever I
was not uncommon for me to be approached by network marketing recruiters. Apparently I “looked the part” of what they were searching for. I turned all of them down but one, the *Pre-Paid Legal* guy. This sales opportunity was, in my view, a really great one; I also respected the company and their mission (and still do). The problem was that nothing had changed in terms of me being poorly suited for sales, nor had my appetite for it altered much. Not surprisingly, therefore, I failed once again. Although I rose to the rank of Director in the company, such an accomplishment did not really mean much in my individual case, and for all the time I invested in my *Pre-Paid Legal* business (part-time efforts for several months) I earned less than $500 cash. Financially speaking, it was a big waste of time.\(^{197}\) On the other hand, I did receive some extremely valuable training in the art of business philosophy, some of which has remained with me.\(^{198}\)

![Figure 110. “Director” certificate as a Pre-Paid Legal network marketer.](image)

197 The opportunity itself held a lot of potential, and I considered the company to be a quality organization, which is why I pursued it. It was the nature of the job that was not ultimately a good fit for me.

198 Specifically, I listened to, and was greatly influenced by, a CD presentation by the famous business philosopher Jim Rohn. It was entitled, *Building Your Network Marketing Business*. While I would never again foray into network marketing or any other kind of direct sales (I had finally learned my lesson for good), Rohn’s business philosophies were generally relevant to human behavior, personal and organizational success, and Self-Leadership in general. As a professional seminar trainer and public speaker, I continue to quote various remarks of his from that CD presentation.
Seminar Seedlings Begin to Sprout

The following year (2005), I redoubled my efforts to succeed as an entrepreneurial public speaker/trainer by sharing my message on personal leadership. Using contact information I was privy to at the Leadership Center, I was able to contact virtually every high school in the State of Utah and offer my *pro bono* services as a motivational speaker on personal leadership topics. The price was definitely right for a positive response from these schools, and I was able to schedule and teach 38 more seminars at 22 different locations all over the State during the first six months of 2005.

Feedback from students attending my seminars was very positive. Some anonymous examples include:

- I liked how [Jordan] tried to incorporate everybody into the presentation. It made you think about what was said and how we can apply it to ourselves.
- [Jordan] was cool. It was a very helpful presentation.
- [Jordan] knows how to get [your] attention.
- I liked that [Jordan was] like us.
- I thought [Jordan] did very well and it was easy to look you in the eyes which is always kind of difficult.
- [Jordan is] a very good speaker, and kept my attention. It was lively, and actually kept me awake.
- I enjoyed listening to [Jordan] and [he has] given me a lot to think about.
- [Jordan] kept my interested in things. [He] spoke well and [he] know how to talk to teens.

Others offered their names and were printed in my book (Jensen, 2005, opening pages, no page number).

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Some student feedback was constructive, and some was apathetic, but there was very little negative feedback.
Jordan’s book helped me get my life on track. Now I know that I can succeed.

– **Erin Christiansen, High School Junior**

As I read Jordan’s book my eyes became opened to a world of opportunities I never knew existed. I truly felt inspired and uplifted as I realized the great potential I have to make a difference in the world and in myself.

– **Lindsey Ashton, High School Senior**

When life is beating you up and you think there is no reason to continue, this book will help you not only see hope, but how to achieve it. It is an inspiration to read.

– **David Lewis, College Freshman**

I loved Jordan’s presentation! Unlike a lot of people trying to teach you something, he was able to explain things and get the point across in a way that was understandable. I learned a lot.

– **Alyssa Roberts, High School Student**

It’s important to remember that we are the leaders of tomorrow. Jordan’s seminar motivated me to become a great leader of others; more importantly, he showed me it all starts by leading myself.

– **Nichole, High School Student**

While such comments were nice to hear, what grabbed my attention even more were the goals that students were setting as a result of what they had heard. Examples included:

- I will exercise regularly rather than throwing up.
- [I will] not slough [skip/ditch class] so much.
- I am going to study at least 30 minutes 5 times a week.
- [I will] not skip chemistry.
- [I will] do my homework right when I get it.
• [I will] study harder and split big projects into smaller assignments.

• [I will] Be on time to class.

• I am going to get a 4.0 next year.

• I am going to work the whole summer for football.

• [I will] start respecting more.

• [I will] be obedient to parents and not complain.

• [I will] study for [my] math final and go to a tutor.

• I decided to get my homework done before I do anything else and take school more seriously.

• I will start going to class, I hardly ever go to any [right now].

• [I will improve] my grades [next year] to a 3.2 GPA.

• I'm going to try and view things more positively and not get angry when something I can't control goes wrong.

• If I want things to happen, then I need to take action.

• Break up with my boyfriend.

• Look at things more positively.

• Read about something for 20 minutes every day.

• Change my attitude.

• Be persistent with my exercising.

• I'm going to take a better, more in depth look at myself.

• I am going to write a personal constitution and organize my priorities in the order of importance.

• I will earn a 3.0 GPA instead of my usual 2.8.

• I am going to get an A in Math and English.
I also began to collect professional endorsements of my seminars and later my book.\(^{200}\)

Jordan is a gifted presenter to a teen audience. His message is compelling and relevant to a wide range of people, but is especially valuable to secondary students.

– **Jack Zenger**, CEO, Zenger/Folkman, Co-Author of *The Extraordinary Leader*

Jordan presents a thoughtful and engaging approach to teaching youth how to tap into their leadership potential. His model is not only well-organized, but it makes perfect sense and is immediately applicable.

– **Sharlene Wells Hawkes**, Former Miss America (1985)

The I Am Sovereign Personal Leadership Model is inventive, informative, effective, and practical. It provides tremendous opportunity for high school students everywhere to better realize their potential both in and out of the classroom.

– **Betty Ann Rember**, High School Principal

Jordan brings both passion and knowledge to his speaking engagements. He articulates key elements of accountability and possibility to become a leader of self, and in turn, influence and impact others. He is willing to share both his successes and his failures, which allow everyone to relate to him.

– **Annette Crangle**, Senior Training Consultant, *FranklinCovey Company*

Students can see that [Jordan] is almost as young as they are…they can see what he has done and been able to do and accomplish in his life just a few short years after where they are at in high school and I think it gives them great hope.

– **Terry Moore**, High School Student Council Advisor

**Risking it All on One Turn of Pitch-and-Toss**

One of my favorite poems is Rudyard Kipling’s *If*. In the third stanza Kipling proclaims:

\(^{200}\) Endorsement quotes quoted from Jensen (2005, opening pages, no page number).
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss.201

All this positive feedback, endorsements, and student goal-setting built my confidence and bolstered my credibility. It also encouraged me personally, and strengthened my belief that I really had something going. It led me to believe my days at the Leadership Center and trying to build my Pre-Paid Legal clientele and sales team were numbered. The problem was I did not have any money, and my combined income from the Leadership Center, Pre-Paid Legal sales, and all other side work I was engaged in was barely enough to pay the bills as it was. As Covey (2004) remarked: “No margin, no mission” (p. 225). While my margin was zero, I was definitely on a mission by this point in time, so I started seeking out financial backers from among my immediate and extended family members. Initially, I was successful in doing so, and was able to ultimately obtain loans of approximately $45,000, most of which was from my Mom and a generous Aunt.

By the middle of the year (2005), I had moved in with my Mom (my parents got divorced in 2004), and began working full-time on my new venture. My mother had just come into some cash through the divorce, and generously lent me enough money to take things to the next level as well as to work on the project full-time. I incorporated my company under the name Freedom Focus LLC, had a professional website developed, wrote, directed, and produced a 15-minute professional marketing DVD, hired the

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production and printing of 5,000 advertising brochures (see below) and letters, and began
work on a full-length book.

Figure 111. I Am Sovereign seminar marketing brochure (outside).
Losing, and Starting Again at My Beginnings

By the end of the year, I had mailed out my brochures and finished the first few drafts of my book. Realizing the local market for my services would be small if I stayed in Utah, I decided to move back to Atlanta, Georgia. In preparation for my move, I faced several difficult personal challenges, including the breaking of my collarbone while mountain biking. It was the first time in my life I had broken a bone.

Late in December 2005, while still recovering from my collarbone injury, I packed up my car with my necessary earthly possessions and remaining marketing materials. It was December in Utah and the weather had turned cold and snowy. As I packed the last bit of “stuff” into my car, it was so full that several loose marketing
DVD’s I’d attempted to toss atop the bulging pile slid back down and out of the car, spilling onto the cold, hard, snowy pavement. As flurries whirled around me, I stooped to pick up the fallen DVD’s, located some remaining space amidst my overflowing cargo, and tossed them on top. Recognizing, even at the time, how pathetic such a scene must have looked, I forced myself to consider it from the perspective of a difficult step leading toward some great future. In the meantime, things were, in *actuality*, bleaker than my positive attitude implied.

Alone, I headed east with my stuffed car the day after Christmas (2005). Upon arriving in Georgia, I foolishly entered into an apartment contract I could not afford, with the “faith” that I would make good as I continued to develop my business. I had no bed, but purchased an air mattress from Wal-Mart. This worked for a little while, but before long sustained a hole and would not stay inflated, so for a period of time, I slept on the floor.  

Once set up in my new apartment, I went to work. I finished my book and sent it off to be self-published. I began writing e-mails to scores of people in an effort to obtain a literary agent and endorsements. My proclivity toward grandiosity led me to naively write to many high profile and famous individuals I did not personally know. From the First Lady (at the time) Laura Bush, to Governors, Senators and U.S. Representatives, to movie stars, and even to a couple of college football coaches I admired. I received

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202 Two months after arriving in Atlanta, I retrieved a queen size mattress that someone in my apartment complex left out by the trash dispenser. It was clean and in excellent shape. I seized the opportunity to claim it. A thoughtful neighbor helped me heft it up the stairs to my third floor apartment. I’ll never forget how wonderful it was sleeping on that nice, soft, mattress after having slept for a period on the floor. I continued to use that mattress as my personal bed until I got married, when we gave it away to someone else who really needed it.

203 I had screen crushes on actresses Emmy Rossum and Natalie Portman, and liked the relatively clean cut, modest, and intelligent images they seemed to, from my limited perspective, portray. I even wrote more
almost\textsuperscript{205} as many rejections as I sent out. An example of one that was particularly memorable was from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (then a State Senator from New York). I liked this one because her rejection was merely implicit. “Perhaps, I thought,” she was open to an endorsement after reviewing my book. I was deluding myself. This was just an extra nice way of saying, “not only will I not endorse your book, but I will probably never even look at it, but I’d like to make you feel important and good about yourself anyway.” Very professional, and very diplomatic; no wonder she would soon become the nation’s top diplomat. Though it never bore me any fruit (of course), her letter was easier to read than some other rejections because the wording did not explicitly reject, which I appreciated.

\textsuperscript{204} Mark Richt (University of Georgia) and Urban Meyer (University of Florida). A big fan of Meyer’s, I cherish his signed rejection card on Gator stationary to this day. Certainly an unorthodox (and unintentional) means of getting an autograph!

\textsuperscript{205} Some didn’t respond at all, making the rejection rate an even 100%.
Another one of my favorites came from the University of Florida’s (at the time) head football coach Urban Meyer.
I cherish this note from Meyer, not merely because I would eventually become such a big fan of him and his family and his football teams, but because, like Senator
Clinton, the words employed in his note were softer than some of the other rejections. Although he ultimately turned down my request, he did so while simultaneously making me feel as though my work had value and that I was important.

The most painful rejection came from the office of Stephen R. Covey. I all but worshipped Dr. Covey’s work, and by extension, Dr. Covey himself. I had been greatly influenced by his work, and felt in many ways that I was following in his footsteps with my own work on Self-Leadership. Nevertheless, not too long after soliciting his office for an endorsement, the razor blade of rejection cut deep into my heart and then slashed around a bit upon receiving the following letter.
My book did not even manage to make it past his screening committee, much less him. It was as though Stephen Covey himself was saying to me: “Jordan, you are neither ready nor worthy of my commendation and endorsement.” The letter stung, filling my heart and soul with the acrid poignancy of failure. His tacitly communicated message was, of
course, veracious. Over the years, the experience and credibility gap that so dammed my efforts at the time has, thankfully, narrowed substantially; but I will never forget the smart of my heart in that moment of grave disappointment.

Then there were the literary agent rejections. I sent out scores of electronic queries in an effort to secure a literary agent to represent my book. Almost all of them turned me down. In hindsight, I do not blame them one bit. They did not know me from Adam, and probably get such requests from amateurs all the time. My head was in the clouds and I was grasping for unlikely miracles; however, I continued to believe in myself. Amidst all the rejections from literary agents, a small handful wrote me to request additional information on my project. I signed an agreement with the first agent who made me an offer to take on my project. Success at last! Or so I thought.

Then there were the requests for financial backing. The success I had enjoyed raising money from family members in 2005 dried up the following year. Multiple requests for loans from both immediate and extended families were refused. At the time, it was a difficult pill to swallow. In hindsight, I am ever grateful I did not incur any more debt than I already had. I was on my own now, and was approximately $70,000 in debt, about $13,000 of which was on credit cards. In the previous year, my total income had been less than $3,000. I currently had a $700-per-month rent payment, and zero income. I had gotten into my apartment and was surviving temporarily on one, final $3,000 loan from my Mom.\textsuperscript{206} It was a matter of weeks before I would be completely out of money.

\textsuperscript{206} This was the penultimate loan from my Mother. I managed to borrow one last amount ($990) from my Mother in early February to ensure that my financial obligations surrounding my book’s publication would be honored. The total amount I now owed my Mom was $33,500, by far the largest chunk of my approximately $70,000 of debt. It took over six years, but in the spring of 2012, my wife and I finally paid off the last of the $33.5k. My Mom was the last of our debtors, and her loan, being the largest, was the most difficult to pay back. To her credit, and our gratitude, she agreed to not charge us interest or inflation charges, something I will compensate her for at a future date.
At this point, I began desperately scrambling to get on top of my situation. I applied for a job at Target.²⁰⁷ I looked for employment opportunities online. Before I left Utah, I had designed flyers advertising myself as an educational tutor for high school and college students and had copies of them made. Once in Georgia, I hand-delivered over a thousand of them throughout the area. Hundreds of them I delivered door-to-door in more affluent neighborhoods. Others I dropped off in conspicuous places (e.g. high-traffic areas with billboards, or individuals who could get the word out) at schools and at a local college. One night I was running fliers door-to-door in a neighborhood I’d never been to before. I ran and ran and ran, delivering as many fliers as I could. After dark, being unfamiliar with the area, I got lost in the maze of subdivided streets and could not find where I had parked my car. My journal entry for that day estimates I ran/walked a total of 30 miles that evening between delivering my fliers and trying to find my parked car. I was weary at the end of the night and did not get home until after about midnight.

The next day my journal records:

I was very sore today. Ran a few more fliers anyway. By the evening my muscles were not so sore as were the actual bones in my feet—[the] left and right sides of them. It was a soreness I can’t ever remember [experiencing] before.

After mailing out 4,800 marketing letters and brochures to public and private schools in all 50 states advertising my services as a speaker, I had received only five calls, and only two of those had materialized into actual paid speaking engagements, for which I had done during the fall of 2005 before moving back East (one in Colorado and one in California). I had no more paid seminars on my schedule. Time was running out. I was on the verge of having nothing to eat and getting evicted from my apartment.

²⁰⁷ I must have been overqualified because they never called me back.
Never Breathe a Word About My Loss

Desperate as my situation had become, I was far too embarrassed to crawl back to my family in Utah for any more financial assistance. Additional requests for business loans from several members of my immediate and extended family were all denied. At one point in 2006, I even received a respectfully reproachful letter from my Father explaining that the time had come for me to stop asking for money and to make it on my own. It was clear I had maxed out my familial lending capital. I knew he was right, and receiving the letter was an enormous blow to my pride and hopes for a miraculous change of fortune with my seminars and book. Though I was certain of the potential worth of my cause, I was failing to create a margin, and was out of options to raise further capital. I had chosen to take an uncalculated risk that was, in hindsight, foolhardy in the extreme. Actually, I was not entirely blind—even at the time—to the extent of the risk I was taking, but I felt a deep, inward tug to take the leap of faith, come what may. It was as if Life was testing my mettle and resolve to determine how much courage and audacity I was willing to demonstrate in pursuit of my mission, and I sensed that the only way to realize my long-term mission was to prove to Life (and myself) that I was sufficiently willing and brave to pay any price as apportioned by Natural Law. Reflecting back on this difficult period, and knowing what I know now, I would never repeat my steps exactly as I did then; however, these same steps—imprudent as they were (practically speaking)—had the desirable benefit of indeed proving to myself that I had the stones to take a leap of faith into something I really believed in, and hold nothing back in the process. This willingness to “go for it,” come what may, has since empowered me with a quiet, but meaningful, inner confidence. It has also emboldened my sense of self,
purpose, and mission, despite the temporary pain and difficulty it introduced into my life. In time, extraordinary blessings stemming from these risks began to make their entrances onto my life’s stage, but the timing would not be of my choosing.

I am quite confident my family would not have wanted me to go hungry or homeless, but I was far too embarrassed to ask for another dime of additional assistance from any of them.\textsuperscript{208} Indeed, the very thought of making such a further request nearly made me sick to my stomach. I was relieved to be living on the other side of the country where I could pass through this horrifying experience far away from their immediate, and probably judgmental (understandably), glances. Fortunately, they all pretty well stayed out of my business, something I was—and still am—very grateful for. If any of them had tried to pry into, or get involved in my personal affairs at this time, it would have only made a very difficult situation that much harder for me to deal with. I needed time and solitude from my family to figure my situation out; thankfully, they obliged me.

Loathe to ever ask for help from family again, I decided to go to the local ecclesiastical leader (a bishop) in my Church for assistance. It was the first time in my life I had requested assistance from any source outside my family. If push came to shove, my family would not have let me starve or go without a roof over my head, but I just could not bear to ask for any more. While I had not given up all hope, I realized that my “faith” in my present undertaking was starting to look to others (and to some extent to myself) like “foolishness,” and in many ways it was.

To my everlasting gratitude, the Church helped me with the majority share of two months rent payment. My local Bishop also provided means to acquire food to eat from

\textsuperscript{208} The one exception to this was asking my father to help me pay a couple of car payments in the early part of 2006. Without this essential financial aid, my car would have been repossessed.
the Bishop’s Storehouse, a place where basic foods are kept to feed needy members in the congregation. It was a tremendous low point for me; however, I was, and always will be very thankful for the help.

Rock Bottom, and Substitute Teaching

Recognizing my ship was not likely to come in anytime in the immediate future, I continued putting in applications for work to acquire some regular income. I contacted a local newspaper to offer my experiences as a reporter and writer, something I had extensive experience with. No luck. I researched online in an attempt to discover opportunities that fit my education and skill sets. No luck. I finally found success with an application to become a substitute teacher in Cobb County, a suburban Atlanta school district. I began substitute teaching in February and continued the rest of the school year. My bishop also connected me with a roommate who was able to help me subsidize my oppressive rent-payment for about six weeks. Between the help from my Church, the temporary subsidization of my rent from a roommate, a very modest income as a substitute teacher, a little unsolicited, token help from my father, a couple of speaking gigs, and one handsome book sales contract (my first) in Virginia, I was able to make it to the end of June without going hungry, getting evicted, or having my car repossessed, although I had begun to receive letters and/or calls beginning the process for both eviction and repossession. I also began to be hounded on the telephone by my interest bearing creditors. These creditors were mostly credit card companies. I had maxed out every credit card I had (five different cards for a total of about $13,000) in an “all-chips-in” gamble on my fledgling business. I had also gotten braces on my teeth 18 months earlier and had an expensive oral operation (gum graft) performed by a periodontist.
before moving back to Georgia. Aside from owing a sizable debt to both the orthodontist and periodontist (credit card), I had not yet completed my orthodontic care. As a result, many were my pleas (verbally or in writing) for mercy to allow me to make late payments. To the credit of both my orthodontists in Utah and Georgia, they always worked with me. The stress and strain of my financial duress inundated almost every area of my life. Consider a journal entry, dated March 26, 2006:

Tonight I went to a lavish feast at the ———‘s house in Alpharetta.209 They live in a palatial residence in a posh neighborhood and it was good to fill my gut to the gills. It is funny how I have such a homeless person’s mentality whenever I find myself in front of a bounteous spread of food and I don’t have to pay for it. I have this fascinating, almost nagging, feeling inside that nudges me to stuff myself as much as possible—as if the more I shovel in the longer I will be able to go without eating again—just in case I don’t have anything to eat in a few days. Of course, I am not that poor, but the psychology is still present (italics added).

**OCD Medication**

When I moved to Georgia, I was also still on medication for OCD, but was beginning to wean myself off of it, in part because of my growing inability to afford it. Part of me also wanted to test the waters of going off it again. Ideally, a doctor should have been helping me through this process rather than trying to do it on my own, but when one cannot afford a doctor, and it is not a life threatening issue, one is apt to do what one feels one must do, which is exactly what I did. The following journal entry, dated March 27, 2006, captures my thought processes surrounding the issue. It also captures my conjecturing on why I struggled with OCD in the first place.

I have been working steadily toward weaning myself off of my medication. I have, up until today, felt that it is the right time to put my exit strategy into effect. After today I am not so sure because I had an obsessive episode this morning on the way to school that involved an obtrusive thought of giving myself paper cuts

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209 Alpharetta is an upscale Atlanta suburb. The couple that owned this home were teachers in my Church. They had generously invited me and some other young people in the congregation to their home for supper.
in between my fingers. It was a miserable experience and the most powerful episode I have had in at least two months, and only one of two such experiences since I have been in Georgia the past three months.

I am currently down to \(\frac{1}{4}\) the dosage I was on a month ago. So far, it has been fine, until this morning.\(^{210}\) Going off of the medication is motivated mostly by the fact that I cannot afford the damn stuff. I don’t have a problem taking medication if I need it, but the financial strain I have been under for so long, and the fact that I have lost my health insurance\(^{211}\) because of an inability to pay the premiums has caused me to consider whether I am at a point where it would be wise to try and once gain taper off of the medication.

At the time of this writing—1:50 p.m.,—I have not had another obsessive episode, and I am going to continue to monitor my progress with the much lower doses I have been taking, nevertheless, I remain deeply desirous to go off of the medication as well as ambivalent as to the wisdom of doing so.

The little episode I suffered this morning was hellish and more than anything, what it did was help me to realize just how good I have had it the past many months. It is easy to forget—even for me—how things used to be in my more pathological times. The thought crossed my mind this morning that from a logical standpoint, the reason I have OCD is because I have been blessed with such a tremendous capacity to think (both quickly and multi-dimensionally) and I am so naturally ambitious and self-motivated and proactive, that my mind must be engaged in processing a certain amount of information at any given period of time and if there is not sufficient data at hand to process, my mind will latch on to an obsessive thought in order to fill the gap. This is a partial and certainly an imperfect conjecture on the issue, although I wonder how much validity it might also hold.

Pressing On

On the sixth of April 2006, I received the first shipment of my books (565 copies). My roommate helped me carry the boxes up to my apartment. I continued to work hard while harboring largely unrealistic hopes that my business would take off and rescue me from drowning in debt. A paragraph from my journal on April 6\(^{th}\) illustrates.

\(^{210}\) Unfortunately, I did not record in my journal what this episode entailed, but apparently, I had been psychologically attacked by a series of obsessive thoughts that morning that produced a cause for concern. \(^{211}\) I went for many months that same year without auto insurance as well. I simply couldn’t afford it anymore. I still had to drive, and took my chances with the law until I could finally get it once again the next year. Fortunately, I kept my driving “nose” clean, and was able to evade law enforcement in the matter until I could once again afford car insurance.
Got some more calls from creditors today. How I hate answering such calls! How frustrating it is to not be able to pay my debts! After getting two such calls, I almost ignored a third call that came but decided to go ahead and face the music like a man. To my delight, the third call was not from a creditor but rather from one of Governor Jon Huntsman Jr.’s staff members, and as of tomorrow, my book is going to go out to Governor Huntsman for review with the possibility of an endorsement quote! I was pleased immensely. I also got a letter today from a staff member of the Governor of Kentucky. It wasn’t a yes, but it wasn’t a no either. It was a “we’ve forwarded your letter on to the appropriate sources.” So, there is hope there. If I could get a few big name politicians and a celebrity or two to endorse the eventual re-publishing of my book by a major firm, that would be awesome.

Around this same time, I badly sprained my ankle playing basketball and was on crutches for a week or two. For my entire life up until November 2005, I had never been seriously injured. Now in the course of four months, I had broken my collarbone and badly sprained my ankle.

I continued to work very hard on my business. Whether it was seeking endorsement quotes, writing and publishing online newsletters, signing up educators throughout the United States for my newsletter (over 30,000 in all, which required a mammoth investment of my time), mailing out desk copies of my book, developing marketing materials for e-mail, or working on my book proposal with my literary agent, I was still a long ways from giving up. I was also starting to get some feedback on my book. One reader, all the way from Africa wrote:

Hi Mr. Jorden, [sic]

I really do not wana [sic] miss writing you an email and THANKING you for the best book I have ever read!! It made me really very thirsty for rereading it again and again... whatever words I write to thank you, they won't satisfy me because it is really the best ever book I have ever read in my life.

Thank you so much and hope many people read it and pass it on to others to take great advantage from it!!

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[^212]: Not surprisingly, a response and endorsement from Governor Huntsman never came.
Thank you, Merci, Gracias, Shoukran....

I was fortunate enough to book a speaking gig in March at Monticello High School in my hometown while I would be there with my brother to compete in a triathlon. Unfortunately, the triathlon got cancelled because of weather. Fortunately, I was able to teach the seminar and earn a few bucks ($200). My Dad, empathetic of my situation, sent me off with an envelope, which he instructed me not to open until I was on my way. To my great thanks and relief, it held another $200 cash. What a timely blessing! This would help me get back to Georgia and help ease my extreme financial angst a bit.

The next month, I received a reply from a high school principal in Virginia who had received one of my online newsletters. He was very interested in my book and seminars, and ended up hiring me to come speak to his students. He also purchased copy of the book for all the students I would be speaking to (about 200 books). What a Godsend this order turned out to be! It provided me with several thousand dollars of badly needed income and helped me to stay afloat for a few more months.

Despite this windfall, my regular income as a substitute teacher continued to prove insufficient; moreover, school would be ending soon, which meant the end of all substitute teaching work for 10 weeks throughout the spring and summer months. With my literary agent and his partner now pitching my book proposal to major publishers, my big breakthrough hinged on securing a publishing deal.
A Temporary Terminus

The publishing deal never materialized. I had now “[made] one heap of all my winnings, … risk[ed] it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss;”—and had lost. Now it was up to me as a self-leader to “start again at [my] beginnings, / And never breath a word about [my] loss.”²¹³ I had to wake up from my dreams of a storybook ascent into literary and financial fame and glory. My fantasy of becoming a Stephen Covey/Tony Robbins to the teenage crowd had been crushed by the stark potency of reality.

This disappointment and temporary failure led to a period of several years where I lost almost all my interest in building my business. I felt like a failure and was up to my eyeballs in debt. The wounds of the soul incurred from these events were slow to heal. They eventually would heal, but it was a slow process that would take over five years.

My Saving Grace: The Andersons

One tangible signal that I was losing my battle with time was the receipt of my second eviction notice. Desperate as ever now, I turned to the last source of help I knew I still dared turn to: my dear cousin Ida Anderson and her (then) husband Steve. These were the same cousins I had lived with back in 2003. Ida had already offered me a place to stay when she heard I was moving back to Georgia, but deeply desirous to “make it on my own” and maintain the full measure of my independence and autonomy, I had turned her offer down. I no longer had the luxury of doing so. If I wanted to stay in Georgia, I had two choices: move back in with the Anderson’s, or get evicted and become homeless. There was always the option of crawling back to Utah and moving back in with my Mom until I could get back on my feet. That was not ever much of an option in my mind. The

thought of going back to Utah and facing my family with no money, lots of debt, no immediate prospects, and feeling like an abject failure was more than I could bear, and my self-respect and pride refused to grant that option viable status. It still would not be easy to move back in with the Anderson’s, but it would be a far better option than living on the street, and it would be a much less dreadful option than going back to Utah to face my own immediate family members who were, no doubt, perplexed by the decisions I had made in my life over the course of the past year.

The Anderson’s generously offered me free room and board while I got back on my feet. They also lent me over two thousand dollars so I could avoid being evicted, losing my car, and going bankrupt. I actually met with a bankruptcy lawyer in downtown Atlanta because I had become so overwhelmed by my personal debts and the stream of creditors’ calls to me. I ultimately chose to avoid bankruptcy for three reasons. First, from an ideological standpoint, the idea was anathema to my personal sense of integrity. I did not want to have to live knowing I had inadvertently pilfered the treasury of others without justly repaying those funds. Second, from a more practical standpoint, I did not want to risk the negative consequences to my personal credit. Third, from a purely practical standpoint, I did not have the cash necessary to pay the attorneys to file for me even if I had opted to go through with it. Talk about the ultimate irony: I was too poor to declare bankruptcy!

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214 It is not my place to judge others who may have declared bankruptcy at one point or another in their lives. This is just how I felt in regards to my own unique situation. I had borrowed the money with every intention of paying it back, and my integrity begged me to make good on that promise, no matter how long it might take.

215 This is a bit ironic because by this point in time, I had already incurred much damage to my credit score. As of the year 2013, I still do not have a credit card with my name as the primary account holder due to the dings my credit score sustained during this difficult period.
My cousins, the Anderson’s, truly did save me from utter financial ruin. In addition to granting me free room and board, the Anderson’s also gave me a summer job as a nanny for their two sons. This freed Ida up during the day so she could work full-time helping her husband start his dental practice. I worked full-time as a nanny through the summer and then part-time in the fall (after the boys got out of school) while I continued to work to try and build my business. The money I earned as a nanny allowed me to keep my car and continue making minimum payments on my interest bearing debts.216

My Long Walk Through the Desert217 Continues

I was able to drum up some additional speaking gigs and an additional book sale at a high school in Indiana for late that summer. Unfortunately, my Grandma Jensen died while I was on the trip to Indiana to fulfill the contract. A dearly beloved family member to me, my Grandma Jensen had loaned me $3,500 the year before to help get my business off the ground and then, of her own volition, freely forgave the repayment thereof. She was one of my greatest supporters and advocates, and I was close to her. There was no way I was missing her funeral. She even had me on the program; I was to offer the invocation. Of course, I did fly out to Utah for this vital family function, but

216 My non-interest bearing debts with family members were, for the time being, all put on the back-burner. In time, with the help of my wife Lina, we would pay off all non-interest bearing family debts including my Mom’s $33,500. Two debts (from my Aunt Ruth [$8,500] and Grandma Jensen [$3,500]) we did not have to pay off because they were generously forgiven at the sole, and I might add gracious, discretion of the lenders.
217 This is a reference to Peck’s (1997) “desert of maturity,” p. 67, which is also referenced in Peck (1993), p. 19.
unfortunately, the cost of the last minute plane ticket gobbled up the majority of the money I had earned from speaking and selling books in Indiana.218

As the spring and summer progressed, my literary agent had continued pitching my book project to book publishers, including major New York publishing houses. The rejection rate was total and complete. For the time being, I would have to rely solely on my self-published version. Towards the end of the year, however, I ended up finding an interested publisher all on my own. Far from being a big New York publishing house—or any big city’s publishing house for that matter—he was a publisher, and he agreed to publish an edited and revised iteration of my original self-published book. After I had finished the manuscript and turned it in to him, he decided it was not what he was looking for, completely reneged on our contract, refusing to publish my book. My failure to publish my book with a publisher was temporarily complete.

Beginning in January 2007, I went back to substitute teaching as often as I was able.

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218 I was unaware at the time of the existence of bereavement fares, and pretty much dropped the same amount on my last minute plane ticket as I had earned speaking in Indiana. It was one thing after another, and I just couldn’t seem to gain any ground.
I also picked up several more speaking gigs (some paid, some not) from my marketing efforts the year before, including in the States of Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana,
North Carolina, and California. That November my girlfriend, Lina, attended the Alabama seminar, a keynote address in Birmingham where I spoke to my largest audience to date—1,200 students! Still, I remained broke financially. When school ended in May 2007, I was desperate to find new work since I would not be able to substitute during the summer.

**Drying Cars for Extra Cash**

Always open to new opportunities to earn cash, I was able to help the friend of a friend who owned a car washing business. His job was to power wash new and used cars at local car dealerships in and around Atlanta. Our job was to follow him around with chamois cloths and dry the cars off after he had sprayed them. The work started very early in the pitch-darkness of pre-dawn and then continued into the heat and humidity of the mid-morning to early afternoon (depending on the day). It was terribly tedious, physically taxing work, yet it was amazing how one can find a rhythm to what they do—no matter what the labor consists of. It is interesting to compare the difference in my attitude from having to perform this menial labor in 2007 compared to the temp work I performed back in 2004. This time around, I was far less prideful. In 2004, the terrible dejection I’d experienced from the unrequited romance following my return to Utah in combination with my penurious financial situation, poor work prospects, and impatience for success (which all bred arrogance) had made such work bitter. This time, the work was just *hard*. This fact was, to me, a sign of my growth, maturity, and humility.

**Fri. June 8, 2007**

Arose at 4:20 a.m. this morning and was at work drying cars at a car dealership at 4:45. I had an excellent attitude, and my pride and ego that was felt so powerfully back in 2004 when I temp worked for *NuSkin* in Provo was not nearly as strong as
it was back then. Seven very grueling hours and hundreds of dry cars later, I finished and was instantly $70 richer. That’s a darn hard way to make $70. The saddest part is that I will probably be making $70 in this same way more than once this summer. It is all for my good in the long run, right? Right? Maybe. Crud!

I would indeed earn quick cash this way several more times (six) in the next couple of weeks, but fortunately, was able to find another, regular, work opportunity to preclude a long-term stint at such strenuous labor. Later that summer I also registered with a temporary work agency as I had back in Utah in 2004, although I only ended up filling one position there since I also ended up getting regular work. It was a packaging position and I chronicled the experience in my journal.

**Thurs. August 9, 2007**

Today I worked a temp. work shift for a packaging company. We were packaging *Androgel* information packets for a company called *EPI*. I felt grateful for the work but it was boring, tedious labor and I didn’t get out till 12:30 [a.m.]. I worked over 16 hours today and still didn’t even make more than $140 max. It is depressing considering I made $997.00 in only three hours just yesterday.\(^{219}\)

**Tending the Temple Grounds**

Fortunately, I found a regular work opportunity through my Church, and landed a job as a grounds keeper for my Church’s temple in Atlanta making $11 per hour.

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\(^{219}\) The day before I had taught three paid seminars in North Carolina for the same client who had hired me in Virginia the year before. While I was getting a “taste” of what it felt like to earn handsome, professional’s wages, I was not yet invited to dine at its table.
I worked on the temple’s landscaping crew throughout the summer and into the late fall. For the first time in over eight years (since before my mission; pre-1999), I actually had a full-time job that offered 40 hours per week. For this, I was grateful.

Physically, my job at the temple involved almost exclusively outdoor, manual labor. It was hard work, and Atlanta can get hot in the summer. Moreover, August 2007 was one of the hottest summer’s on record in Atlanta, with temperatures rising (uncharacteristically) above 100 degrees on multiple days that month. Such heat conspired with Atlanta’s trademark humidity to beat down on us with occasioned fervency as we mowed, weeded, pruned, planted, trimmed, swept, and de-littered the temple grounds. The most difficult single task I remember in my labors was extricating a large tree trunk from the ground. The vigorous chopping and digging required was thoroughly exhausting. As I labored in that humid mid-morning atmosphere, sweat dripped plentifully and saltily down my cheeks, neck, back, and legs. As hard as the
work could sometimes be, however, I cherish the time I was able to spend working on the Atlanta Temple grounds. It was—no, do not laugh—a holy experience in many regards. It also provided me with an opportunity to work for an organization with remarkably high standards in everything they undertook. Never, before or since, have I done yard work on such near-flawless grounds, and as a team, we worked diligently to keep it that way. It was also picturesquely beautiful—a tranquilly peaceful setting to labor. Such an atmosphere made one feel safe, secure, and comfortable, despite the physically taxing nature of the job. While I was a far cry from being where I wanted to be in my career, working on the grounds crew of the Atlanta, Georgia, LDS temple remains a priceless memory in the annals of my life’s work.

**A Light at the End of the Tunnel**

About the same time I landed my job at the temple grounds, I attended an employment meeting at my church. At this gathering, a most fortuitous conversation took place with a brother in the church (an employment specialist) that would change the course of my life. After learning about my background and ambitions as a speaker, he asked me if I was familiar with contract training. I had never heard of it before, but was immediately intrigued by the concept. That same week, I researched the industry online and was able to identify a couple of companies that specialized in contract training. I then prepared and submitted an application and resume to both companies. One of them rejected me citing insufficient experience. The other one, *Fred Pryor*, was more open-minded to my resume. They conducted a phone interview, which I passed. The next step was a live audition at their home office in the Kansas City area. Fortunately, I was driving back to Utah in July to attend a family reunion anyway, so I scheduled an
interview in Overland Park, Kansas (their headquarters at the time) to coincide with my return trip to Georgia following the reunion. My live audition was successful, and they invited me to attend their trainer orientation to be held at the end of August. I took about a week off of work to drive back to Overland Park for the 3-day train-the-trainer program. It was a rough trip. First of all, I could not afford motel rooms, and had to sleep in my car at rest stops alongside the Interstate Freeways during my journey there. Once I arrived, I found a local branch of my Church and asked if there was perhaps some fellow in the young, single adult congregation with whom I might throw my sleeping bag down on his floor for a few nights. A leader in the congregation was called, and a place was found for me to stay for a few evenings with a brother from the congregation. As difficult as it had been to ask for help, it was a nice hiatus from sleeping in my car at rest stops, at least for a few nights.

The first morning in my temporary digs, I discovered I had locked my keys in my car. I was deeply discomfited by my careless inadvertence. The *Fred Pryor* facilitators had made it crystal clear we were not to be late the following morning. I managed to get a ride to my training with the fellow with whom I was staying, but I still ended up being late. I was very upset with myself. It was also very embarrassing because I had my sleeping bag with me, which must have looked very strange. I should have hid it in the bushes or something before I went in, but, feeling sorry for myself, I supposed I hoped they might feel so too and at least be more forgiving of my tardiness. I had to take it with me because the fellow I was staying with was going camping and would not be back until the next night, so I had to spend one more night at the rest stop before I could return and spend the last night again on his floor. I was a bit of a basket case inside, but managed to
maintain my cool sufficiently to finish out the training that day. To make matters worse, the company declined my request to teach a course on leadership and signed me up to teach a grammar course instead. Grammar was about the last course I wanted to teach; they had obviously targeted me for grammar when they saw an English degree on my resume. At one point during the training I felt like giving up and driving home; but at this point in my life, I also knew my options were limited. I was a beggar, not a chooser, and falling short of completing the course would have been epically foolish. I had to suck it up, humble myself, and see the thing through. After putting up an initial fight about the grammar course,\textsuperscript{220} I decided I better play it cool and conduct myself with more humility if I wanted to have any work at all. To my great relief and satisfaction, I successfully completed the training and signed an official contract through my company,\textsuperscript{221} which I had fortunately already incorporated back in 2005, to teach seminars for Fred Pryor. As a contractor, I would not have benefits like I would as an employee, but they would book my seminars, pay for my travel expenses, and remit my speaker’s fees and commissions.

A month after certification, the company booked me for my first seminar run in Texas. I taught four grammar and proofreading seminars on four consecutive days. In the intervening month, I had been stressing quite a bit about what the future would bring. Several questions burned in my mind. What if this new training gig did not pan out? What if I did not receive sufficient bookings to make ends meet? Was my business ever going to take off? What if Lina dumped me? I was so worried that I even began asking

\textsuperscript{220} Ironically, and to my great surprise, after teaching 29 different seminar topics for Fred Pryor (as of 2013), the grammar course became one of my all-time favorites to teach.
\textsuperscript{221} Being incorporated was a pre-requisite for contract training with Fred Pryor.
questions about career opportunities in the military. One of my roommates at the time was a Captain in the U.S. Army. As a college graduate, I could join the army and quickly become an officer. Such a move would guarantee a consistent stream of solid income for the first time in my adult life. But the Army? While an honorable profession in my view, it would be an enormous deviation from the career path I had embarked upon thus far. How would such a decision affect my chances with Lina, a budding mechanical engineer who would be able to write her own ticket after graduation? Such questions produced plenty of angst in my mind and heart.

The financial trouble that had climaxed in early 2006 had still not abated much. I remained consistently one to two payments behind on my car. My father had helped me purchase the vehicle new back in 2003 for a very low interest rate (0.9%). The problem was that no down payment was made on the vehicle, so I ended up being saddled for years with a $315 monthly payment—a large sum for the kind of car I was driving (2003 Honda Civic LX). My Dad had bailed me out of an emergency back in 2006 whereby I would have lost the car without his assistance. In the meantime, I had made payments whenever I possibly could. Somehow, I had amazingly avoided repossession.

Nevertheless, on Sunday, September 30, 2007, I flew from Atlanta, Georgia to Houston, Texas for my first professional seminar “run” teaching Fred Pryor seminars. I was slated to teach the grammar course, which I would teach every day for four straight days in College Station, Beaumont, Galveston, and then Houston. One of the requirements of contracting with Fred Pryor was to have a standing credit card with at least a $2,500 limit. With my poor credit score, procuring such was not an option, so I

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222 I moved out of my cousins’ house in late May 2007, after eleven months.
223 Following a tour of duty in Iraq in 2006, he was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia. He would spend his weekends in Atlanta where he would crash in our apartment for a partial-rent fee.
persuaded my Mom to let me take a card out in her name with the promise I would pay the balance of my travel expenses with the reimbursement money and/or other pay from Fred Pryor, a promise I kept. In Houston, I had no other money except that credit card. At first, the card was turned down because they were not expecting it to be used in Houston, Texas. I mildly panicked, realizing that I had no other means of purchasing food that entire week. Fortunately, a call to the credit card resolved the problem, and I was able to eat. The seminar run went well. Though I had been out of college for over four years, I would finally receive my first paycheck making professional wages. I had a long ways to go, but this opportunity was a most welcomed “light” at the end of what had proven to be a very dark and very long “tunnel.”

**A Panic-ridden Break-Up**

Two weeks before Halloween, Lina broke up with me after eight months together. Although our relationship had been going very well in the whole, she remained unsure of her readiness to take it to the next level (marriage). With a little forewarning that the break-up was pending, I panicked. Not knowing what else to do, I decided to officially propose marriage. It was a bad idea, and it was a pathetic proposal. I did not even have a ring. It was nothing more than the desperate last stand in the face of certain failure. Rather than magically change Lina’s mind, which I somehow deluded myself into thinking was possible, Lina just cried to have such pressure put on her, causing me to feel terrible for what I had done. Though the break-up was already inevitable, this move on my part sealed the deal. I drove Lina home, and she severed the relationship. I drove home in the dark, my spirit subdued, my hopes dashed, my heart broken.
I had difficulty getting to sleep, and even when sleep came, peace was not to be found in my dreams. With my temple grounds job, there was little time to lie around in bed and be depressed. It was up at 5:45 a.m. as usual to arrive to work by starting time at 6:30 a.m. I was distraught and despondent. My boss, a single woman who attended the same local church congregation as Lina and I, noticed my downcast spirits and empathized with my plight. The lot of romantic failure, which had been mine for most of my life, was mine once again. At least this time around my heartbreak was fully legitimate—a result of genuine loss rather than a symptom of poor mental hygiene and pathological insecurity as in days gone by—since Lina actually had been my girlfriend. For the first time in my life I had actually had a steady, exclusive dating relationship over an extended period of time, and now that relationship had been dishearteningly dissolved. I was crushed.

A Harbinger of Hope

As I suffered through this heartbreak, exacerbated all the more by my terrible financial and other (personal) insecurities, a memorable incident took place one day as I was working on the temple grounds. The weekend that Lina had broken up with me, all the flowers at the temple were ripped up by the roots and thrown away, signaling the conclusion of the summer season. One day that next week, as I worked alongside one of the more prominent flowerbeds near the temple’s entrance, I overheard a temple patron talking with one of my colleagues—a humble Hispanic man—who was cultivating the soil in the bed opposite mine. Disappointed to see the bed bereft of its typical multi-colored flora, she exclaimed disappointedly to my colleague: “Oh, the beautiful flowers are gone!” Then, simply, but eloquently, as if it had been a scripted line in a play, he
quite naturally, and in a mollifying tone replied: “Don’t worry Sister, it will be beautiful again.” Though almost entirely obsessed with and dismally distressed by my recent breakup, I was still sufficiently cognizant to overhear this simple, brief exchange. The symbolism of the incident was not lost on me, and I wondered, and even dared to hope, that it might be a foreshadowing of things to come, if not with Lina, then with someone else. Only the passage of time could answer such musings. In the meantime, I continued to suffer at having lost “my girl.”

**Beautiful Again**

Soon after, the fall flowers were planted in the temple beds, and true to my colleagues words, they were beautiful again. As for the flowerbed of my life, it turned out that Lina had been suffering over the break-up as well, and after one frightful fortnight apart, she accepted my offer to get back together again. I had not dreamed to hope for such a quick retraction of her decision to break-up, but as had been the case throughout my relationship with Lina, this time, things were different than they had been in the past. I was overjoyed by her decision; she seemed happy about it too. Things were beautiful again with us, and it had all happened more quickly than I had anticipated.

Our reuniting afforded me the opportunity to spend Christmas break with Lina and her family in South Florida (Homestead). I also taught about a dozen more seminars for Fred Pryor in November and December; things were looking up, and my life’s flowerbed was indeed beautiful again.
The Turning Point

By early 2008, contract seminars were being booked to my schedule with surprising regularity. I was not used to such success with my work, and was greatly encouraged by it. I was, however, playing catch-up financially, and still faced some great difficulties making ends meet financially. I was fortunate enough to have a roommate who allowed me some grace time to make late payments on my rent, and I also received help from the LDS Church to make a couple more rent payments. Nevertheless, things were clearly looking up. The remainder of that year, I had steady work teaching seminars with Fred Pryor. Such work provided me with the opportunity to travel all over the Eastern and Central United States where I gained invaluable experience as a professional seminar facilitator. Moreover, I was now making enough to money to get on top of my bills and begin the long process of paying down the massive debt I had incurred. Finally, I was meeting my interest-bearing obligations on time, and was even able to start making small, token payments on my non-interest bearing loans from family members.

In February, after another, but shorter (1-week) break-up, Lina had decided she wanted to marry me. My life had taken a remarkable turn for the better both financially and romantically.

Lina went to study abroad in Shanghai, China for two months leading up to our marriage. Our wedding date was set for August 8, 2008 (8-8-08), the same day the Summer Olympics were set to begin in Beijing, China. When Lina got off the plane from China on July 19th, she was wearing an Olympic pin that read: “20 days left.” Surrounded by loving family and friends, we were married “for time and all eternity.”

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224 This phraseology describes the purpose of matrimonial ceremonies conducted in LDS temples. Mormons believe that marriage by proper authority in dedicated holy temples inaugurates a couple’s
in the Salt Lake City Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It rained on our wedding day. My Aunt Ruth said that according to the Chinese, rain on one’s wedding day is propitious. After the perilous pathway that had marked so much of the past few years (even the past two decades for that matter), I was ready and eager for something propitious.

After our wedding, we honeymooned for a week in the Phoenix, Arizona area. At the end of the week, we boarded separate planes to fly home. While doing so was sad, it was also a wonderful sign of my continued work as a seminar trainer because as Lina flew back to Atlanta to begin school, I was on my way to Orlando Florida for a week of seminars. I continued teaching seminars through the fall. In October 2008, I had my biggest month to date, 15 seminars! I made more money in one month than I had in all of 2005 combined!

Shortly before we were married, Lina and I received a serendipitous financial windfall worth $18,000. Lina’s marriage to me granted her citizenship in the State of Georgia, thus allowing her to pay in-state tuition costs for her senior year. This occurrence was rather miraculous because a recently instituted policy had made garnering marital status via conjugality more difficult to obtain, but for some fortuitous reason, the agent completing the paperwork decided to waive the new policy and grant Lina in-state status as per the old policy. We were thrilled, and grateful to our Heavenly Father for His blessing of grace in the matter. I am sure Lina’s parents were too.225

potential to create a connubial relationship that can last beyond the grave. There is no use of the conjugal colloquialism “till death do you part” in an LDS temple wedding.

225 Lina worked as a co-op student every other semester throughout her college career and thereby earned a sizable portion of her schooling costs by her own efforts. She also applied for and received several scholarships. Despite these dual efforts on her part, her parents still ended up contributing approximately $15,000 to her college education. Due to this financial windfall made possible by Lina becoming a Georgia resident through marriage, her parents no longer had to provide her with any financial support.
Our Fortunes Flourish as Wall Street Crashes

That fall, the infamous financial meltdowns on Wall Street and the bursting of the housing bubble marked the beginning of the worst recession since the Great Depression. As the nation’s financial woes were just beginning, ours were ironically beginning to end. As I continued teaching seminars and substitute teaching on days off, Lina wasted no time seeking out post-graduation employment. Despite a full-load of major courses in her program (mechanical engineering), she diligently dedicated a sizable portion of her time each week to attending career fairs and making application with numerous companies. Her hard work and diligent efforts paid off. That fall, she was offered a job with the engineering firm she had worked for in Atlanta as a co-op student while pursuing her undergraduate degree. She also went on five different recruiting trips with Fortune 500 or Fortune 100 companies. These recruiting trips bore much fruit in the form of handsome offers from four of the companies she interviewed with. She ultimately made her decision to take a job with a major (Fortune 100) corporation in Houston, Texas. We moved there the following May, right after she graduated. Her starting salary was flirting six-figures. We were both reeling with astonishment and excitement at the news. For two middle class kids who had grown up modestly and faced financial difficulties in our lives, this was an unprecedented and most welcomed development.

Changing Course Amidst The Great Recession

As 2009 dawned, the economic recession that had already begun strangling the U.S. and global economy took a similar chokehold on the training industry, retarding the
positive momentum my business had enjoyed throughout 2008. I went from getting 10-15 seminar bookings a month to a mere two or three. It was frustrating to see my work evaporate right before my eyes. I continued to substitute teach whenever I was not booked to teach a seminar. In the midst of the economic downturn, even substitute teaching positions were becoming scarce as more and more people lost their jobs and began to, like me, clamor after whatever work was available. When signing up for a substitute assignment post 2008, I would sometimes have to wait on the phone for a good while until a job would come available that I could then snatch up quickly. I felt like a bear in an Alaskan river that had more bears than fish along its banks. This was very unusual. Before the Great Recession hit, there was usually 10-15 jobs available at any given time and I could simply go online and take my pick. Those days were now gone; however, as I was persistent, I almost always found some job somewhere in the district where I could substitute teach on days I was not teaching a seminar—which were becoming increasingly common.

Looking to the Horizon: Expanding My Education

Recognizing that my career was once again being blunted temporarily, I began to consider my options for increasing my education. I remembered my mentor, Dr. Bruce H. Jackson, who had gotten his Ph.D. in human and organizational systems from Fielding Graduate University, a distance educational school of higher education headquartered in Santa Barbara, California. I decided to do some research online about Fielding and other options for doctoral degrees. I did not have to do much research to discover that Fielding had an Educational Doctorate degree program in educational leadership and change that was “right up my alley.” Trusting in Bruce’s positive experiences and what I saw online,
I worked diligently to complete the application process in the nick of time to make the summer deadline. To my joy, I was accepted into the program. Apparently the “powers-that-be” in admissions had viewed the authorship of my book, the scores of seminars I’d taught, and other work I’d accomplished in an effort to get my business off of the ground as life education and experience commensurate to a Master’s degree, or so I supposed. I would therefore, be able to bypass a Master’s degree and move right on to an Ed.D.

Despite my failure to get my business off the ground on my first try, it seemed as though other opportunities were opening up because I had gone for it and given it my best shot with the resources and opportunities to which I had access. This felt compensatory for what little I had achieved in light of such audacious risks taken in an effort to get my message of personal leadership to the world. To make matters even brighter, Lina’s new job would make it possible for me to go to school 100% debt free.

**Time to Celebrate**

Shortly after Lina’s graduation from Georgia Tech in April 2009, we moved to Houston where she began her new job. I was very proud of her. She had worked very hard her four years in college (including three semesters of full-time co-op employment), and had finished with a 3.97 grade-point average. This middle class girl, who started her education in the public schools of Homestead, Florida, now had a Bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from one of the top five engineering schools in the entire United States, and one of the best programs in the world. She had worked diligently and been highly proactive in her efforts to secure work at a time when companies around the nation had stopped hiring and were cutting back on their work force.
After her graduation, we went on a weeklong cruise together to the Western Caribbean to celebrate. Neither of us had ever been on a cruise before, and as we hand-in-hand sailed away from the Port of Miami that beautiful spring afternoon, we both tried to just take in the majesty of the moment. The opportunity to enjoy such a luxury was a palpable signal that our lives were changing in a big way, and for the better. We now had money to do things we could only dream of just a few months previously. Nevertheless, we also had our share of bills and debts to pay, and were mutually motivated to proactively save our money. Our combined debts (my business and Lina’s schooling) equaled approximately $80,000. Even with Lina’s handsome new salary, it would be some time before we could fully extricate ourselves from this combined debt.

Once in Houston, Lina started her new job. About a month later, I began my doctoral program at Fielding Graduate University by attending their new student orientation in Austin, Texas.

Teaching High School

With my seminar work almost entirely dried up, I began looking for employment as a full-time schoolteacher in Houston while we were still living in Atlanta. Our move to Texas with Lina’s work was a great blessing because a hiring freeze had been enacted in the school district (Cobb County) where I substitute taught in Atlanta, so full-time positions were unavailable. The recession had not hit (nor did it ever end up hitting) Texas (and especially the Houston area) like it did other parts of the country; school districts there were still hiring. Moreover, it was easier to obtain a teacher’s certificate in Texas than it was in many other States because of the high demand for teachers. As such,
I was able to enroll quite easily in an online teacher certification program for the State of Texas.

After moving to Houston, I went to work seeking out an actual job. I set up profiles (online applications) for myself with five different school districts in the Greater Houston area near where we lived. I sent resumes out to schools advertising open positions. My online job-searching efforts bore little fruit, and secured zero interviews. Then, I received some excellent advice from a woman who worked for the organization that I was obtaining my certification from. She explained the importance of actually visiting schools to make personal contact and drop off hard-copy resumes. I explained that often the online instructions for job searching specifically asked candidates to not come in person, but to fill out applications online and wait to hear back from them. In essence, she replied: “It doesn’t matter; if you are serious about getting a job, you need to go out and make personal contacts.” Intuitively, I knew she was right. I also knew that such an action would be a big step out of my comfort zone. I have already amply chronicled how much I despised sales oriented “cold-calling.” Yet, this is exactly what I needed to do to get a job. Swallowing the unpleasant pill, I dressed up in my best suit, armed myself with resumes and copies of my book on personal leadership for high school students (and concomitant marketing DVD), collected all the necessary contact information, and set out to visit every high school in the Cypress-Fairbanks (Cy-Fair) Independent School District (the district where we lived). It was not easy for me to do this, but I did it, and found that once I was out there, it was not as bad as I had thought it might be. This woman’s advice was timely, and my efforts paid off. After making personal visits to all ten high schools in the district, I secured three interviews. On my
first interview, I was offered a job before I even had time to get to the other two interviews. Still more of a beggar than a chooser in my mind, I called my brother Joe for advice about whether I should even go to the other two interviews. He was a brand new high school principal himself, and knew a lot about the process I was undertaking. His advice was to take the job and bag the other two interviews. I agreed, and did just that.

One of the main motivations behind accepting the job I was offered without pursuing the other two interviews was that the school that had offered me the job was the most diverse, and perhaps the most challenging (anecdotally speaking), school of the three that offered me interviews. This was attractive to me. As a white, middle-class male, I believed it would be very beneficial for me professionally and educationally (in light of my newly embarked-upon Ed.D. program) to gain more experience working with a student population that differed widely from my own educational background. I recognized that my decision would likely take me the furthest away from my comfort zone, and would thereby present me with all kinds of difficult challenges. Like the period of time preceding my missionary service, there was no way to truly understand what I was getting myself into until after I was full into it, and I was indeed about to be tried by fire. Second only to the overall difficulty of my missionary service, this full year of teaching high school would prove to be the most trying, single challenge I had ever undertaken. On the plus side, and for the first time in my life, I was under contract to make a college-educated annual salary that would guarantee a consistent bi-weekly paycheck for an entire year as long as I met the terms of the contract. While I would be

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226 This is not to be compared with my overall experience with OCD, which represents not one single challenge, but a series of on-going life challenges.
making less than half the salary of my wife, this event represented a significant personal achievement for me. I was 30 years old.

I was a minority\textsuperscript{227} teaching at Cypress-Ridge. I was also a rookie.\textsuperscript{228} Moreover, I was still working through certain OCD issues that would prove adversarial in my success as a teacher. Indeed, I was not always successful. In fact, I got off to a very rough start. After the first six weeks grading period, I was called into the Principal’s office. He informed me that my classroom failure rate was the highest in the entire school; and I was not teaching at a small school; there were nearly 3,000 students enrolled. He was nice about it, but let me know that such a rate was not going to cut it. I made other rookie errors, some of them glaring, some of them embarrassing, and some of them influenced by OCD issues I was still working through. After Thanksgiving, I was called into the Principal’s office again. This time, he was not as congenial as the first time, and called me on the carpet rather forcefully. I was having difficulties with classroom management, and he informed me I had not been taking adequate personal responsibility in the matter. I had also expressed a concern about the school’s in-school suspension system that they had interpreted as unmerited criticism. Things had begun to negatively pile-up on my scorecard, and he was beginning to lose his patience with me. Without mincing words, the Principal boldly said to me: “Maybe you should take some time out over the holidays to figure out if this is really for you.” I was offended by his implication that I ought to consider quitting mid-year. I also felt he had been unfairly harsh with me in light of the enormous classroom challenges facing any first year teacher. Finally, I felt his calling me on the carpet for criticizing their in-school suspension system

\textsuperscript{227} Among the student body, not the faculty.

\textsuperscript{228} Every teacher I have ever talked with on the subject of first-year teaching has been in agreement about the inherent difficulty of one’s first year of teaching, no matter where one happens to be teaching.
was unreasonable since, in my own mind, their arrangement really was not very effective. On the other hand, I was sufficiently self-aware to recognize that no matter how challenging the students were, or how demanding the work was, the Principal was right; I was ultimately responsible for the results I got as a teacher. Moreover, I realized that in light of the other issues that had arisen with me to date in the school year, I lacked the moral authority as a first-year teacher to be giving suggestions to administration about how to improve things in the school. Whatever details he may have missed, the Principal was ultimately correct in upbraiding me as he did. Nevertheless, it was an awful serving of “crow,” and if I wanted to grow through this challenge and ultimately succeed as a teacher, I had no viable choice but to “eat it.”

This represented a moment of great decision for me. Would I quit? Would I keep on while continuing to blame my external circumstances (which were enormously challenging), or would I take full responsibility for my results and go to work on what I could control: my own Self-Leadership. The answer was easy; the solutions to my problems were not. Nevertheless, I went to work. I had no other recourse. I was stuck, and the only way to get unstuck was to change myself. Practically speaking, quitting was a viable option. With my wife’s handsome salary, we were not going to starve if I opted to focus full time on my doctoral studies. Furthermore, doing so would even accelerate my academic progress time-wise. My work as a first-year teacher was so demanding and time-intensive (12-hour days were not uncommon my first semester) that I had very little time to work on my studies. Nevertheless, my sense of self-respect and dignity precluded this option. Furthermore, I knew that giving up would ultimately harm my internal, and perhaps my external, credibility. Who was I to pursue a Doctorate in Education if I was
just going to quit midway through a real-life educational opportunity and responsibility? I knew quitting would be commensurate with failure, and would be a stain on my character and integrity. I had made a commitment to this school for the full-year. While quitting may have been an option practically speaking, it was not an option morally speaking.

The principal had made it very clear that it was my responsibility to manage the behavior of the students in my classroom. While the administration was there to help and support us as teachers, the primary responsibility was mine, and that was a responsibility I could no longer dodge. So I went to work. I stopped complaining and making excuses (mostly) and threw myself into the task before me. I further developed a system for rewarding positive behavior, punctuality, and academic performance, and it caught on with the students. I worked to improve the relationships I had with my students. I also began to focus more on teaching them principles of Self-Leadership in conjunction with the established English curriculum. Over time, I began to see individual and collective improvement among my students. Before the year had ended, I had lowered my overall classroom failure rate from 38% down to 11%.

At the end of the year, the Principal commended me for my hard work and improvement. He also gave me a positive review and recommendation moving forward. I was still far from being a perfect teacher, or even a quasi-veteran for that matter, but through a combination of teaching Self-Leadership to my students and practicing it myself, the year ended very differently than it started. It was a humbling and rewarding experience for me. I gained a greater respect for the hard work of full-time teachers, and the difficult challenges they are up against in a postmodern public schooling
environment. I am now quick to stick up for teachers when I hear someone bad mouthing them, or otherwise devaluing the worth of their unique and essential contributions to society.

**My Unofficial Sabbatical to Newfoundland**

About midway through my first full-year of full-time teaching, my wife was offered a two-year foreign assignment with her company in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada. She desired to take advantage of the opportunity, and I supported her. She left in March of 2010. Determined to finish out my contract with Cypress-Ridge High School, I finished out the school year and then joined Lina in St. John’s in June. I confess to being greatly relieved by the reprieve my wife’s Canadian work opportunity afforded my fledgling career as a pedagogue of secondary students. The year had been very difficult, and I was thrilled at the prospects of moving on to pursue an informal sabbatical that would quicken my progress in my doctoral program.

We lived in St. John’s for approximately two years. During this time, I pursued my doctoral work full-time and continued to teach Fred Pryor seminars part-time.²²⁹ I was successful in my doctoral work and made steady progress while in Canada. My wife and I enjoyed our adventure in Newfoundland. We made many wonderful friends. We also spent a great deal of our time in service to the local branch congregation of the LDS Church in St. John’s. Finally, we were fortunate to do some travel, hiking, biking, and camping whereby we were able to take in the natural beauties of Newfoundland and other parts of Eastern and Atlantic Canada.

²²⁹ I taught 70 all-day seminars in five different Provinces of Canada while we lived in St. John’s.
In April 2012 Lina was transferred back to Houston, Texas with her job. In March 2013, our first child, Tucker Joseph Jensen was born. That same month, I completed my doctoral work and had it approved. We also moved out of our last apartment and into our first home. In a span of three weeks, I became a Dad, a doctor, and a homeowner.

**Fulfilling The American Dream**

A lot has happened professionally and educationally for me over the past several years. My “career crucibles” of 2003-2010 have turned into the career and educational successes of 2007-2013. To date, I have taught over 250 all-day professional seminars. Since 2001, I have delivered/taught over 400 speeches/seminars to over 15,000 people in 46 different States (U.S.A.), Provinces (Canada), districts (Washington D.C.), and territories (Puerto Rico).

My (and since 2008, my wife’s and my) income progression from 2005 to the present is illustrative of the personal and professional growth and progress I/we have made in our lives in multiple arenas.

- 2005: $2,537
- 2006: $16,591
- 2007: $23,339
- 2008: $37,744\(^{230}\)
- 2009: $70,817
- 2010: $168,314

\(^{230}\) Beginning in August 2008, my wife’s and my income are figured jointly in these statistics. The majority of our combined income since May 2009 has come from my wife. During this period I was pursuing doctoral studies and professionally training only part time.
2011: $172,064
2012: $143,969

While income is but one measurement of personal and/or professional success, it does provide a tangible measurement to go by. Between 2008 and 2012, we went from being approximately $80,000 in debt (business debt and student loans) to being completely debt free (minus a mortgage) and having amassed a net worth that was (as of 2012) approaching a quarter of a million dollars. We were also able to pay for my doctoral program—a $70 thousand dollar price tag—in cash. In the spring of 2010, we made our last interest-bearing debt payment; in the spring of 2012, we made our last non-interest bearing debt payment. We have achieved a sizable and growing nest egg without winning\textsuperscript{231} or inheriting any of the money. Such a trajectory did not occur over night, but given several years of dedicated hard work, focus, and patience, fortune has favored our mutual commitment to Self-Leadership.

Another quantifiable measurement by which I can measure my success is in my steadily improved academic performance over time. In high school, I did not break a 3.0 grade point average (2.94). In College, I finished with a modest 3.2 GPA, but in my doctoral work, I got straight A’s (18 A’s, 1 A-, and 5 A-plusses) to finish with a better-than-perfect 4.049 GPA. One might say I finally “arrived” academically.

After all the ups and downs, after all the debt and angst, and after all the faith and doubt, and after all the toil and hope, I am proud to have lived what I believe can rightfully be called a Great American Success Story. My parents raised me to believe that America is a land of unbounded potential, and that I could do, and be, just about anything I set out my mind toward. As cliché though it may sound, they taught me that when you work hard, follow the rules, and never give up in America, I could eventually be successful in whatever I set out to accomplish, despite whatever challenges accompany the journey.

\textsuperscript{231} I did win $32 once in a slot machine in 2011 in Windsor, Ontario. I was in Windsor teaching a seminar for Fred Pryor and was trying to win enough to cover my supper at Caeser’s Palace’s lavish buffet. I succeeded. I have since terminated my brief foray into casino gambling.
They were right! The fruitful realities of this promise took many years to materialize; but now, looking back over more than a decade of “plow[ing] in hope,”232 I know what they taught me was no mere fairy tale. Today, I know it is real. Furthermore, I am excited by the realization that our journey is, in many ways, just beginning. As I reflect back on a journey that was as stressful as it was exciting, adventurous, and educational, I take enormous personal satisfaction in knowing that my wife and I are living and fulfilling The American Dream.
