

An email arrived in the inbox of our computer on May 15th. It was from Patrick- an invitation to share “what contributed to the spiritual person you have become.” My immediate reaction was a resounding “NO”; yet there were some nagging thoughts that kept coming back to me. This has resulted in many random thoughts —

My first action was to try to define “What is spirituality?” I went directly to the most accurate source available namely Google. That almost brought an end to this effort as there was unlimited information to sift through. Some I could reject immediately and there was some to ponder.

In the end I chose an article from Canadian Virtual Hospice, and I quote: What is spirituality? Every person has spirituality. Whatever moves or expresses your spirit or inner energy is part of your spirituality. In some senses your spirituality is expressed in every aspect of your personal and public life. it is just part of who you are — woven into and expressed through every thought, feeling, and action. What becomes clear is that spirituality has these core elements: A—Finding or making some meaning in your life. Everyone deals with issues such as identity, suffering and hope. What makes such issues spiritual is that they raise questions about the meaning of life, life in general, and your life in Page two particular. Your spirituality is shaped by the answers you give these questions. B— Learning to live in relationships Consider your relationship with yourself, with others, with the natural world, with the human- shaped world, and with the transcendent dimension. (The Creator -- God) The way we express our spirituality is shaped by our personal, family, and cultural experiences. End of quote!!

So where to start— I was not struck by lightning and the apple did not fall from the tree and land on my head. It is my belief that spirituality is not static but is constantly evolving.

I was born toward the end of the Great Depression - the Dirty 30’s. My birth certificate gives the land description rather than the name of a hospital. There were certain practises that were constant in our household — each morning dad read from the tear-away calendar, a German devotional, prayer before meals and at bedtime. Church attendance was more or less regular. It gave the feeling that these things were important.

The other aspect that was a constant was work ethic. It was a given at that time as it was a matter of survival. Shared labour of both parents and by children when they were old enough to participate. Sharing within the community — threshing crews - fall butchering times- Page three demonstrated that collectively some tasks were more easily done. The need for community - to have people around was established as a way of life. Our neighbours were not all Mennonites- thus without thinking about it my horizons expanded.

Eigenheim Church occasionally had visiting ministers. One Sunday morning Rev Art Pauls from Laird spoke on Daniel Chapter 5. As an 8 or 9 year old a part that I remember, and I quote, “You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” As I now think back on that — it set standards of what one was to do and be. I could itemize other things like that — each item became building blocks in shaping who I was to become.

In the late 40's my family had the "wanderlust" and followed two of Dad's brothers to Ontario in search of greener pastures. That didn't work out so we travelled all the way to British Columbia, that is where mom's family had gone. That too did not work out so we returned to our roots in Saskatchewan. As we were leaving Yarrow B.C. my grandfather came to me and said "I want to give you Psalm 121 to take with you". To this day it continues to be my favourite Psalm- "I look to the hills from where does my help come." I often think of how the Psalm has been a reassurance and validation of who I am.

In High School at RJC Rev Arnold Regier wrote in my report card—"Wally would be a good student if he put as much effort into his studies as he does into hockey." It was a kind reminder to get my priorities in line. My three years at RJC were formative years in many ways. My love of Page four hockey and fastball were affirmed and gave me an identity as an athlete. The choirs cemented my love of 4 part harmony. Academically I was pushed to do better.

My dream career choice was to become an RCMP Officer. I think what I wished for and saw was the glamor of that profession. My mother gently but firmly suggested that I chose a profession where—"you are looking for the good in people instead of catching them when they are doing wrong". At the time I didn't wholly endorse her thinking but did chose to enroll in Teachers College. What followed were 30 plus years of a very satisfying career.

Whenever I left from home my mother's parting words always were (said in low German) "Be good and don't forget to pray." For the first quarter of my life she was the most influential person in my life. Simply just by who she was. Her faith in fellowman and her unconditional faith. A true model.

One of the big factors of influence in my life was where I taught. I was following an older brother who had established a very good reputation as a teacher. Thus in my fourth year of teaching I moved to a community where I was totally unknown. The challenge was to stand up on my "own two feet". It was also a non Mennonite community so again I needed to assess my values as to who I was. It was a rewarding time for me. A lot of life lessons learned. The community had a United Church and a Catholic Church. On Sunday mornings each person went to their own church. Everyone came to community Page five events— weddings, funerals, fowl suppers— I learned they had much in common even if they worshiped in different places.

In that community I sang in the United church choir. There was a funeral in the church during a school day and I informed them I would not be able to sing. The choir had already checked with the principal and he OK'd my leaving my students. I explained to the 7 & 8 graders that I would be away for an hour and gave them work to do. When I returned the classroom was quiet, every student was working at their task. I was very proud of them. Our trust factor was very well established.

1965-66 were significant years in my life. I was a university student on leave from Regina Public Schools. In that time a relationship grew and Marg and I were married in May of 1966. I was fortunate to get a job in Saskatoon and so this became our home. Karen born in 67 and Brian born in 68 rounded out our family. It is not possible to list all the ways this changed and influenced my beliefs and value structure. Needless to say, aside from that my early foundation at home, this has been the most significant aspect in my spirituality. It now

fell on Marg and me to live our lives within the values we had been brought up with and shaped together to pass them on in a new way to our children. It now was our responsibility.

In 1970 I accepted a teaching position with the Department of Defence to teach children of military families station in Ramstein Germany. It was a 30,000 Page six man base of which Canada was a very small component. Our children were 18 months and 2 1/2 years of age. We did not know a single person in Germany. We lived in a 4 story apartment block on the base. We were the only Canadian couple in the whole building. We were very warmly welcome as they were all military families and were used to moving from one place to the next. Without a doubt we had to stand on “our own two feet”. We did not have a phone for more the first 6 or 7 months. No TV for a year, and no internet. It took two weeks for letters to get to us from home. My routine was more easily adjusted to when school started. It was not long before we had established very strong relationships with teacher colleagues and our neighbours. They became our family. It was a time of testing of who we were and what we believed in. Even 50 years later we are in touch with a group of them now by internet.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the time we spent in Voluntary Service after superannuation . Two years at Shekinah, and the 4 sessions with Self Help Crafts in Ontario, Atlantic Canada, and Saskatchewan— Ten Thousand Villages gave us wonderful opportunity to meet many people from Saskatchewan to Newfoundland.

I will not list all the other specific milestones other than to point out that things like first child in Kindergarten, then graduating, children in university, children getting married, children moving away to Toronto and Australia, death of parents, death of a child, and now siblings all impact who I am and what I do.

One of the elements in the definition was “Learning to live in relationships.” It is clear to me that there is no singular aspect that has positively or negatively shape my spiritually. Also, spirituality is not static, it evolves as life’s nuances come to the fore.

I am grateful that in my journey I have met a great variety of people. One could go on, but in the interest of time here is an incomplete list: parents, siblings, relatives, my own family- spouse. children, and grandchildren, neighbours, classmates, teachers, students, colleagues, choir leaders, pastors, church friends, fishing friends, social acquaintances, and on and on.

Reading philosophical material is not my thing, however in one of the recent Richard Rohr meditations David Benner - a psychotherapist writes and I quote: “We live in wholeness when we re-remember our story and, through it, experience a deeper sense of being part of a greater whole. We live wholeness when we know we belong — to people, to a place, to a community and a tribe, to earth, to God (however named), and to the cosmos.... We live wholeness when we know that what we already have is enough and that all we need is to be resourceful with it. Living wholeness is participating in the dynamism of love that gathers everything together into greater unity and consciousness. It is to live with an openness of mind and heart, to encounter others, not as strangers, but as parts of one’s self.” End of quote

Where does it leave me now as I seek to find meaning in this stage of my life . I like to keep it simple Psalm 121 is still relevant as it continues to shape who I have become spiritually.