

Gabe's Veils.

The young boy, me, was now an older adult, and I knew that the path before me was much shorter than the path I had taken to get to where I was now. I didn't care about that, though sometimes I thought about it. Thinking about how much longer I might live was too indistinct and vague to spend much time on. I was healthy and reasonably fit, so no alarms were sounding.

Oh, I wanted to live long enough to finish everything I had started and to live long enough to finish the projects I had planned but hadn't yet started. I didn't want to be an invalid, where I would need to be in a home with around-the-clock care. No, the furthest my thinking got was that I wanted to live longer than I had already, so long as I maintained my independence.

However, I hoped to resolve one aspect of my life before passing. That aspect of my longevity, the nature of my life from its beginning, through its duration, and towards its completion, was for me to hope for and, perhaps finally, answer the two recurring questions in my life, those questions I had realized earlier in my life as needing to be asked and answered many times over.

I had been told and read that finding certain truths was like peeling the layers off of an onion. So, one day, I decided to peel an onion to understand the analogy better. I learned that onions have many layers, and they get incredibly thin the closer you get to the middle. Once you get closer to the center, the layers stop and the center becomes a core. Once I had peeled the onion, the analogy was no longer useful to me except for the peeling apart part, and, at that, I laughed out loud. I put the peelings into a sandwich bag and used them in salads and sandwiches for the next week.

I did learn much during my lifetime of incessant introspection and the extrospection I so devoted to the world around me. I grew weary of asking the extrospection questions, though, and as time

went by, I was able to relinquish my perceived and learned need for the history of people I met and how all of that might or might not influence my life.

I was now an adult with many learned behaviors, and the simple truth I found was that my layers were veils. I began believing each veil needed to be removed to get to the next one, much like the onion, though nothing was hidden under any of the onion peels. So, as I delved deeper within myself, past my theater-of-selves, past the facade and learned behaviors of society, education, church, and government, and deeper towards my core, which was past all those things and more, I would need to keep pulling away veil after veil.

I had been using analogies my entire life. I would try them, and I would break them. Sometimes, I stayed with an analogy for a long time, while I would dismiss others immediately. I liked several of my analogies, plus some of those I read or heard from others. But I understood that an analogy was me trying to understand something for which there was, as far as I knew, no other way to understand a complex or intricate problem literally. Life is like peeling an onion was a great riddle when I first heard it.

I have always had a very restless mind. My mind was always active and even more so around people, as my radar made me question whether I could trust these people. As I continually asked who I was and why I was here, I drifted further into reclusiveness.

I began trying to calm my cerebral cortex during my daily meditations, and I did so by placing a mental image picture of a chair in my mind and sitting in it. I would then watch as the agitated, white-capped waves on the lake, which were my thoughts, gradually calmed until finally becoming still. I loved to see and feel that calmness. Calm in my mind brought overall calm to me. I just loved sitting there sometimes and enjoying the calm. For me, sitting calmly was doing something.

And sometimes, out of calmness, the recognition of the next veil I needed to pull away would come.

One aspect of the veils that I noticed and liked, as I kept pulling away learned behaviors or socially accepted veils that had influenced my life, was that each part of my life's identity and their distinct time periods were like chapters. Each chapter had a veil, and each veil hid something. Each veil hid one or more distinct secrets. One veil hid my fear and shame for what had happened to me, while other veils hid my misplaced guilt for the countless rapes of my childhood, those total, life-altering physical and sexual abuses, and my subsequent, near-total loss of trust in people. I had veils for every physical and emotional betrayal I had experienced by the time I was five years old. I hid behind my veils because whom could I trust to tell the secrets of my early life?

I had veils that covered, concealed, and disguised everything so the boy I was could keep himself safe from everyone around him. The people who were supposed to protect me were instead the predators who had exploited me so completely and mercilessly.

I now understood that I was exposing myself by peeling away those veils. My fear of becoming visible to others stopped me for a while. However, when I finally removed the veils covering my pajamas, I found I was still not as exposed as I feared. I discovered that there were other veils beneath the ones I had already taken off and that I wore them without even knowing I was wearing them.

Let me explain that better. The brain I had at three years old believed I was responsible for being raped because of the pajamas I wore. I somehow attributed the hand-me-down pajamas, which were too tight and short everywhere, to why I was raped repeatedly. That single bit of broken

reasoning satisfied me, and while I was still ordered to wear the pajamas and beaten the one time I refused, there was now at least a reason.

Apart from the mental image pictures I saw in the veils I wore, I soon realized that their style and the other simple or descriptive aspects of what I saw were worn to keep the emotion and emotions hidden. As I realized this, I began to feel the feelings hidden behind the veils in each stage of my life. There were powerful emotions surrounding hiding the secrets of those periods of my life, and each veil hid some terrible abuse I suffered and the shame I wanted to hide. When a particular abuse ended, I was left broken, but my veils left me appearing normal to those who encountered me. I never remembered consciously thinking that no one would want a horribly beaten, abused, and repeatedly raped young boy, but I still hid it from everyone.

The more veils I pulled away, revealing more of my life's secrets, made me want to be alone. I wanted, in many ways, to be invisible to people. For instance, I spoke with someone I had been friends with for many years and misused a word. I used the word photogenic instead of photographic- that's all I said, nothing serious or crazy. The longtime acquaintance immediately, and before I could correct my mistake, launched into a scathing and hurtful rebuke of my innocent mistake in the word I had chosen and of me. I stood there as the words, "You're so fucking stupid," that he aimed at me stuck into me like a spear. I walked away, allowing this incident to propel me away from the individual who had so nastily castigated me just as I'd seen and heard him do to other people. My rule was simple: you can be as mean as you want to others, but you can't be mean to me. If you are mean to me, I'll be leaving you.

As I lived, I learned to dress in an emotional veil that made me appear normal and more social than I was. I occasionally noticed someone moving closer to me as a friend, but while I enjoyed a small amount of social interaction, I was already a loner. The other person would often tell me

they missed seeing me, and I would smile. For I had a saying that I only said to myself, and it went like this: “If you can find the door in, then you can come in. But good luck finding the door.”

My search for the answers to my two lifelong questions of who am I and why am I here, were now, once again, unanswered. How could they be answered since so much had changed? I was still pulling away the veils from when I was forced to hide other people’s secrets. And those times weren’t only when I was too small to protect myself, either. Personal relationships and peer pressure often dictated what veil or veils I should wear.

I removed a veil I wore, finally letting some people know I was one of them, and I felt immediate relief and relief. Later, I felt a responsibility to be the most authentic person I could be. As I removed the veils, I began to find the person I had been looking for all my life. I began to find the person I instinctively knew I was but had never met because my daily life was mostly about keeping my past abuses secret, surviving everything I had been through while avoiding anything negative that might be in my future.

As I removed veil after veil and became more authentic to myself, I began replacing those distortions of who I had been with authenticity and kindness; the type of authenticity and kindness that does not diminish nor increase because of outside influences, but instead, they are controlled by my inner self. I began to understand who I was in the world.

I consciously and finally realized what I had always known deep in my mind: that I was part of a group that didn’t want to be part of any other group. No bragging or ego was involved in belonging to such a small group who, to the casual observer, were disparate people. However, to a more discerning observer, there were remarkable similarities between the people in the group. I and the other members of this small group flourished independently, yet we suffocated when together.

Being in groups made it seem like there wasn't enough oxygen in the air for all those present. And just because I believed I had met someone who belonged in this group didn't necessarily make it so. No, they had to know it too. And even if they recognized me as a group member, that recognition did not bridge our natural differences. The veils others had created sometimes made it seem as if a person was so different that there was no basis for their belonging, and at other times, the veils made it appear they were perfect to belong, but there was no factual evidence to support that.

I often felt that human relationships were not a part of the bond that bound the small group I belonged in and was a part of. The group I thought I belonged to was joined more by spirit than earthly bonds. The group seemed held together by ethereal threads from their broken minds and hearts. I knew that anyone could grab onto one of these ethereal threads, but not everyone knew they existed, and even fewer knew what to do once they got hold of a thread.

I began living alone, and I began to feel complete within myself for several reasons: one was that I was quickly bored around others, second, was that people had already emotionally broken me, and last that I too had hurt people, so living alone protected me from others and others from me. There were many veils I had pulled away over my life. Fear and dishonesty were two big ones. Needing to belong to a tribe or group were veils I had also removed and discarded. Another veil was the need for a person or people to make me feel complete.

Then, a strange thing happened to me; I had always known there had to be others like myself. And I occasionally thought I had met others with whom I could have a friendship, yet friendships had never worked out. The saying I made up to describe my finding friendship was this: "Finding friendship is like finding a nebulous needle in a mile-high haystack." Usually, I identified the reason for not having friends as my inability to reciprocate the friendship required. I tried to

explain to potential friends or in my intimate relationships with women that I needed a small footprint from them. I was invited to parties, barbeques, events, and lunches, but I usually never went if there were more than a few people. I had yet to remove that veil I hid behind, which hid my almost complete distrust of people.

Some people don't want me to try to open doors I shouldn't, which sometimes includes taking up too much of their time. Other times, I want to be left to the sound of my thoughts while they feel it is reasonable to share their daily drama or political and religious preferences.

Many people I met would state their opinions as if they were facts and that those facts were also applicable to me without discussion. I wasn't interested in most conversations, nor was I interested in most television programs or movies that others would talk about. A lot of the time I spent with other people was realizing I didn't want to spend time with those people.

Years before, I had left everyone and everything, including where I had spent the last twenty-plus years, and I moved to a new place hundreds of miles away. I didn't mind moving, I didn't mind complete change, and I didn't fear it. All I ever told people I met in this new location was that I had not moved there to make enemies. I was always friendly and cordial; when I met people who were not kind, I limited my time with them. I would still wave and offer a warm hello, but I wouldn't stop to chat.

My only close neighbors were a man and a woman, who were initially highly aggressive toward me. A few territorial encounters came to pass between my neighbors and me, and, finally, we all exchanged insults; expletives were shouted and traded back and forth. Fists were clenched, and the neighbor phoned the sheriff about my aggressive behavior. As the aggression increased, there were several times the two of us nearly engaged in fistfights, but each time, my neighbor backed

down and would later apologize. Occasionally, he would blame his foul mood on an argument with his wife, and I would say, "Don't take your bad moods out on me!" Over time, I learned to walk away when he was angry, and we grew accustomed to each other's moods and ways of thinking. Gradually, we began accepting and respecting the other's differences, wants, and needs. That's all that changed: acceptance and respect for the other. The reasons for our territorial encounters began to change as each of us compromised. We didn't openly talk about compromise, nor did we talk about wanting a better friendship. We compromised a little without informing the other. Slowly, the hostilities ceased and became events of our past, and in place of hate, our likeness began to come to the forefront during the short times we spent together.

And then, one day, I noticed the neighbor and I were becoming friends. It was a tenuous friendship at best, but I hoped it would signal the end of the ugliness. I still wouldn't have gone to dinner if I had been asked, as my neighbor was married, and his wife was nuts. His wife once told me that God had made her beautiful and that her beauty had saved her life. Yet, she was neither beautiful nor attractive, and I thought she was ugly.

We had somehow built a bridge over the gulf that separated us, and the bridge we created was one where quarreling was not allowed because not quarreling kept things between us from getting instantly broken and out of control. The male neighbor finally felt comfortable dropping by anytime, and he would. We would talk about why we loved living where we lived, from the sometimes near-total quiet to the love his neighbor had for the deer he fed and my love for the wildness where we lived. We loved the tall trees and the nearby lake, and there was never a shortage of topics to discuss. We would sit in the chairs I set out in the sun, smoking cigarillos, talking, and being friendly neighbors. My neighbor would indeed bring up politics, but he would now let me change the subject without getting too angry or shouting at me for too long for not



wanting to talk about politics. Gone now were the arguments, and gone was trying to control each other, and in the place of arguments and control were respect and acceptance.

At first, I was suspicious and apprehensive that my neighbor would one day turn nasty again. First, one afternoon went by when that did not happen, then a day went by, and then quietly, several days, weeks, months, and eventually, a year passed without any conversations about why they were getting along. Each of us just let things be how they were. We stopped saying angry, confrontational stuff to each other and became neighbors. It was odd to accept this friendship, yet it was easy to let it be. As I saw it, there was no cost to this friendship, but there was the benefit of calmness, and in calmness, I thrived.

I realized I had a friend and laughed aloud as I thought that. My next thought proved to be my saving: *I can still walk away, or move away, anytime I want to.* I knew in my heart that friends were not essential to me. And then I laughed aloud again as I realized that my neighbor probably felt the same way. The oddest part was that we would probably never talk about it. We would just let it be what it was.

But I was wrong about there being no cost to this friendship, as it was only a matter of time before my neighbor went berserk again. I sat down and asked my god why these two people were in my life. The answer startled me as I was told that I had invited these people into my life, and even after knowing their tendencies to be mean, nasty, and crazy, I still forgave them and continued with the neighborly friendship. I heard my god say, “You invited them into your life knowing something was mentally wrong with them. Your lesson in this is that you cannot help the mentally ill. Their brains are wired wrong. Do not befriend the mentally ill unless their hearts are good; otherwise, they will always hurt you. Recognize them for what they are and then move on.”

As I considered this, I went back in time. I reviewed my twenty-year relationship with my neighbors. I realized that neither the man nor his wife possessed mature physical, cognitive, social, or emotional development. The veil of maturity they donned disappeared whenever the slightest bit of anxiety, whether real or imagined, entered their worlds. At that point, the veils fell away, leaving the meanness and hatred of their hearts naked and exposed. I had only ever experienced crazy people in scenarios where I could leave. In this case, I was trapped because they were my neighbors.

I could rarely leave my house for the next six months without being verbally abused. The situation deteriorated to being called names or insulted by my neighbor, again, the likes of which I had never been subjected to. The remedy from the sheriff was to get a Restraining Order, which I did not want to do. After half a year, I felt I could take no more and decided I wanted and needed to move.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © 2-25-22