

The Steps to Somewhere.

For the longest time, Douglas never knew he had a problem. Then, once he understood he had a problem, he never knew what the problem was. He only knew he never fit into any group or even any relationship. Still, he almost unconsciously realized this was due to his early life, an innate distrust of people, and his rebellious nature. Douglas was not raised in an environment characterized by normal and healthy interpersonal behavior and interactions. No, his earliest years were as if he was just a toy for predators to do what they wanted with. So, he grew up with no tools or experience in normalcy. To clarify a little, Douglas's early life contained too many instances of abandonment; first, when his biological mother abandoned him after his birth, and then when first one and then other foster homes he was in no longer wanted him, and he was returned. He was in seven different foster homes by the time he was five. Regular, severe beatings occurred; eventually, by three, he was sexually abused regularly. Douglas hated even thinking about those atrocities, let alone knowing that those atrocities happened to him. Douglas was proud that he had survived his youth, and by looking at him, you would never guess his past. Even when getting to know him, you would never guess the severity of the calamity and depravity he suffered. His well-honed survival skills were a gift from God, and the fact that he had used them so adroitly at such a young age was another gift from God.

Some of his most enormous burdens were the secrets that he decided to keep. He never told anyone about the abuse that happened to him. He never knew whether it was the threats of more beatings or the threats from the perpetrators that he would be killed if he told anyone. Strangely, Douglas knew his life was terrible, but, as if he had a sixth sense, he knew that his life could get far worse by blabbing to anyone. Even at a very young age, he knew the people abusing him

were dangerous and believed their dire threats. Growing up with such dark secrets that he couldn't reveal burdened him in ways others had never experienced. Douglas had experienced more physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse by the time he was five years old than most people experienced.

While Douglas was busy adroitly handling his life, he knew something was missing, but he could never figure out what that was because he was so busy with all the new incoming information. The new incoming information was the adults he came into contact with, and he needed to find out if they could be trusted or were predators. The school faculty required constant processing and contained not only peer pressure but also academic and competitive pressures. His peer pressure issues were primarily controlled by Douglas keeping to himself. But Douglas's family was poor, and judging by the state of the outside of his house with its peeling and faded paint, the brown lawns, and the dismal-looking curtains, they were the poorest family in the neighborhood. Douglas wore clothes that would last the longest time, and he wore boots because they, too, lasted longer than his friend's stylish shoes. His boots were always purchased a size bigger than he wore so he would grow into them. His haircuts were done at home by an inexperienced and uncaring person, his stepmother, and it showed. There were nicks and dings, long parts and gouges, and he knew he looked goofy. The other children made sure Douglas knew he looked goofy, too. The teasing was constant, as were the meanness and the cutting remarks. However, every morning brought him valuable, short-term solitude before and again after school, which Douglas used to recharge his internal happiness. He would find salamanders on his way to and from school, and once he found a bullfrog. One day, he even watched a fistfight between two much bigger boys. Douglas was astonished by the world around him as long as he wasn't being harmed.

Douglas knew problems existed within him, his life, and some things at home, but the thoughts were always nebulous. The amount of time he could spend figuring anything out was so small that he only had time to do the best he could in school, the best he could with his peers and the academic pressure. Of course, he tried to do his best in everything, but sometimes, he just had no idea what to do. Douglas was naturally good at sports and everything he devoted time to learning. His grades were excellent by the eighth grade, and he had seemingly survived the trauma of being abandoned as a newborn and then again and again as an infant. He survived the foster homes, his continued abandonment as a toddler, and being raped repeatedly. He was cast out of one foster home to another, and by school age, he was back with his father and his father's wife. The rapes ceased immediately, but Douglas was a very emotionally messed up boy who didn't know how to interact with people. He was fine if people were not mean or trying to control him. Still, when people got close to him or someone wanted to help him, which necessitated physical closeness, he immediately became confused and wanted to get away and be alone. Douglas knew he was safest when he was alone.

Douglas wished he could be a sheep that could blend into a herd of sheep, but of course, Douglas could never be that. His clothes were heavy and made to last a long time, his hair was cut differently, and everything about Douglas made him stand out from the herd. His school grades were A's, except for the classes where he didn't like the teachers. He didn't like certain teachers because they either tried to help him, which caused them to get too close physically, or they behaved like they had power over his behavior. At such a young age, Douglas could not tell his teachers to leave him alone, so he was left to act out his wants and needs by rebelling. Was it realistic for him to believe that somehow the adults in his life would understand him? Douglas never had that thought. So many ideas, desires, hopes, and dreams led to nowhere

for Douglas, and he would quickly forget whatever the day's drama had been. Unless his behavior had come to the attention of an adult who believed they had authority over him. Drawing attention to himself and detention became two things Douglas tried to avoid. He learned quickly that he despised when anyone thought they possessed power over him, and his initial reaction was to rebel. Even people sincerely trying to help him would cause him to rebel against them. Douglas didn't know why he rebelled; his parents didn't understand his constant rebellion, nor did his school or church know why. Douglas didn't even consciously know how much he despised authoritarians. But whenever he was confronted by one, he rebelled. His rebellion didn't stop, even if it cost him something he wanted. If it cost him, it cost him, and that was fine.

Douglas innately knew something was missing from his life, but he didn't know what it was. Douglas knew he had holes in his understanding and began searching for an answer. Now, out of high school and out of the sphere of influence of parental and educational figures, Douglas was free to investigate independently. As Douglas investigated his new environment, he found an eclectic group outside the mainstream with advanced alternative approaches to spirituality, thinking, and health. He learned beliefs such as reincarnation, holism, pantheism, and occultism. He read thought-provoking poetry and the writings of accomplished writers and was introduced to intellectuals who wrote and talked about ideas he had never thought about himself. Douglas finally found himself in a world of meaning, but the learning curve was so steep that he remained unaware of all he had learned. Douglas began asking himself, who am I, and why am I here?

Douglas was living in a vast movement of New Age people. He began smoking marijuana. He listened to the finest music he had ever heard and learned things he had never known

existed. His life finally had meaning, yet Douglas still wasn't conscious of what a life of meaning meant.

His refusal to go to a war he didn't want to go to seemed like an excellent reason not to have to go. But the military disagreed; a federal warrant for his arrest was issued. Douglas was terrified of going to prison, and he fled before being arrested.

Douglas's new life became a life of seeking pleasure wherever he could. He traveled to some of the finest destinations on earth, he loved the most beautiful women he could, he smoked the finest hashish in the world, and he drank the finest alcohol produced in the countries he traveled through. Pleasure distracted him from worrying about imprisonment or finding a deeper meaning in his life. And just as he had been eager and even greedy to learn the information that provided and infused his life with a deep sense of meaning, so too did he now attack this new phase of his life. Douglas forgot some of the education he had recently acquired. He stopped talking about existentialism, meditation, and writing, yet there were times when he saw others using those things again. A part of him would pine for his lost life, but the reality of time spent in jail greatly outweighed any thoughts of returning to anywhere near where he could get apprehended.

Occasionally, Douglas would read. Sometimes, he wouldn't read at all; at other times, he became a voracious reader. He read American and English writers and translations from French writers. Douglas loved reading novels that told stories and contained deep meaning. For Douglas, reading was the same as watching movies. He would stop reading a book or watching a film if there were no meaning. Douglas got to a point where if what he was doing had no deep meaning, he stopped doing it. Again, Douglas was not consciously aware of why he was doing what he was doing, but he was very consistent with what he did and how he

responded. It was as if parts of life were boring for Douglas. The mundane concerns of daily life held no place in Douglas's life. Once he had achieved a goal, he wanted to do something different, new, and challenging.

Douglas's life continued at a crazy speed and always included Douglas making singular decisions to leave a place, people, or both on a whim. Nothing could hold his attention for long, and no one could make him give up his search for his next pleasure. Douglas was nearing thirty years old; he was very handsome, strong, and experienced at handling pleasure experiences. Douglas was happy with his life, and Douglas was very optimistic about his future.

Finally, the warrant for his arrest was lifted, and he was free from the bonds that had kept him away for so many years. Douglas decided to return to where he had lived a decade and a half before for no reason other than he could. Douglas found that almost everything had changed. People he had known had opted out of a life of rebelling for social change or of trying to reign in the social, political, educational, and military norms that they had encountered as they grew up, and, even worse, they had joined the very forces they had initially been so outraged by. Gone were the people he knew who had demonstrated along with him for equality, an end to war, advocating for free speech, and so many other issues. The tract homes they had lived in as children, they now lived in or near as adults. Some lived in beautiful homes in the hills outside and away from the city, and many had married their childhood sweethearts. They had two to four children, two cars, and jobs they went to every Monday through Friday. They discussed their retirement plans thirty-plus years away, and Douglas listened patiently. He was never rude, mean, or condescending and never showed contempt.

Douglas sometimes sat quietly on a dock by San Francisco Bay and listened to the fog horns blowing. Other times, he would hitchhike to the ocean and watch waves coming onto shore. He was intrigued by the waves and how, after they crashed, they immediately blended back into the water around them. First, the curling waves existed as distinct entities, and then they did not.

Douglas began to realize that his life was for him alone to live. His life had always seemed ahead of him, and he was always trying to fix this or survive that, or he was always trying to belong here or there or wanting to be liked and accepted. But those things he wanted would always become valueless and boring because they didn't reach his depths. Relationships had been passionate and electric, but soon, both elements faded. Towns, islands, and countries he visited were beautiful and enchanting, but reality soon set in, and they soon lost their luster. His impulsive behavior to distract himself with pleasure began giving way, and he, once again, began finding meaning in his life.

Douglas's need for a deeper meaning cost him a lot. His jobs didn't bring a more profound sense to his life, so he quit. And it is hard to get financially ahead when quitting jobs regularly. Douglas's marriages had all ended because they offered him boredom. His friendships ended because, or so it seemed to Douglas, he got bored. His friends could do what Douglas could not do: they could do the same things repeatedly without quitting out of boredom. Just watching his friends do the same things repeatedly bored Douglas so much that he stopped visiting them.

Douglas drifted inside his mind, and he drifted amidst the people he met. He was very gregarious as he tried to find people like those he had known all those decades before. For Douglas, being gregarious was a way to pierce the facade of the people he met, and, as he did

so, he learned their true core beliefs and, depending on what he learned, he would either stay or leave. For Douglas, it was the latter.

Then, one day, Douglas sat down and started writing. He wrote a story about a young man who felt he needed to choose between being a creative human being, a writer who could travel and experience everything life had to offer, or he had to throw out an anchor and live somewhere to work and contribute what society deemed was a meaningful life, even though the latter choice would kill his creativity. Social norms told him the last choice best served his contribution to society. Perhaps he felt the burden of society weighing on his choice because he had yet to succeed in the art world he loved.

Finally, Douglas made a choice, and he said goodbye to the society and the people he had tried so hard to be accepted by but had never accepted him as he was. His choice was for him to go his own way finally. And so he did that. He moved to a place where he knew no one, and no one knew him. He didn't go there to make enemies, yet sometimes, people in small towns and villages disliked him simply because he was a stranger. Gradually, Douglas felt an edgy acceptance from some, and this edgy acceptance slowly grew into actual friendships. Douglas didn't encourage friendships, and for some people, he discouraged visits from them. After several years, this new life became a life in which his creativity thrived. He seemed to be in front of his life now, pulling all the pieces together to make the life he wanted. He lived through winters that would have overwhelmed or intimidated him just a few years before because he could learn quickly and adroitly. And he didn't find his life living in the mountains particularly hard. He found he was well-equipped to handle the physicality of this new home, whereas before, he was not equipped to handle the starvation and deprivation that he felt his soul was experiencing.

Douglas had moved to a place where people left him alone if he wanted to be left alone, and yes, Douglas, for the most part, wanted to be left alone. It was the same reason they lived in this place, too. By continuing to be socially gregarious, Douglas found out he had things in common with these people and that they had something in common with him. Of course, he couldn't comprehend how they never got bored with going to work at the same job for forty or more years or being married for forty years or more to the same person, nor did he ever get used to their routines that they continued day in and day out for decades. He never got used to it nor understood why they never got bored. No, Douglas got bored watching movies and rarely watched a movie until it ended. Television bored him, and much of life bored him. But what Douglas had finally found was that he did not bore himself. He lived with himself and by himself for decades; sometimes, a girlfriend would hang out with him, but the challenge of finding his depth was his goal. The challenge of the ever-changing answers to the questions of who am I? and why am I here? continually echoed within his being. It was as if each time he asked and answered those questions, he created another step into the depths of wherever he was going. Douglas knew no fear in the world he had so painstakingly created. He did know that he finally belonged to someone who loved him, cared about him, and, most importantly, someone he could trust completely: himself. He also knew he was now going where he wanted to go.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © May 23rd, 2022