

Invisible Pain

A Letter to my Dad; A Story of Truth and Consequences

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M. Anthony Outen

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{This is an excerpt of the full book}

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Foreword

If you browse through any major bookstore or library, you will find a proliferation of books written by individuals about their unusual, difficult and often traumatic experiences in life. Many are very well written, many are interesting and informative. Some are classics and some are recent publications. Some are written by or ghost-written for famous and even infamous names, for celebrities, politicians, and even “unknowns” who have been found by a professional writer who sees an opportunity to bring someone’s story out into the light.

Then, every now and then, seemingly once in a generation or two, there is something that stands out as a truly unique and surprising find, a disclosure of soul and spirit, not merely a descriptive account of historical facts and personal impressions. Rarely there is something that comes out that speaks not only about an individual and one slice in space and time but about a people, even a nation and whole culture.

“Invisible Pain” is just that type of book, and it was for me, a scientist by training and professional background, a remarkable discovery, one that I could not put down until I had finished reading it. This is a book that is “going places” and it will take many readers to many different, often difficult and challenging places in their own lives and reflections about how we have lived and do live, as individuals, as families, as parents, as children. This is not a very long book, and it is not an academic treatise. It is a Letter, first and foremost, from a son to his father. But it is not just about two persons an isolated events between them; it is not at all what one might typically expect on such a subject. “Invisible Pain” is about the process of living in a culture and society that has been united and divided and united and divided over and over again, and it is about the “Truth and its Consequences” for a very extended network of people, some of whom may not ever have realized the positive or the negative effects of their words and actions upon the lives of many.

I consider myself to be fairly “well-read” in world literature and I have my own special list of favorites among books that I believe bring out the soul of both the author and his or her society in ways that have impact and value for generations to come, even perhaps for all generations. Most of those “classics” are from the past, and their authors are long-since passed on. Most of such books deal with times and societies with which it is very difficult for people of today, in America or in any land, to relate, because so many things are “foreign” in terms of changing lifestyles, changing times. Here, in less than two hundred pages, in literally plain black-and-white, is a classic in the making, and one that does not end with the final period on the final page.

“Invisible Pain” is going to do something to the reader that is exactly the “opposite” to what its title suggests. This book is going to make some pains and traumas very visible, and it is not going to be simple, pleasant, easy reading for anyone. Read this book. Engage with it. Discover Michael Anthony’s world, his childhood, his neighborhood, his family, his friends. Co-discover with him those repetitive and often frustrating challenges to discover things that everyone wants and needs but which are often nearly invisible because sometimes, due to the ways we have allowed ourselves and our society to become, we are here in a Life and no one

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has given us a good Map or even much in the way of clues about what it is we are supposed to Discover.

I really enjoyed reading this book and am honored that the author asked me to write this Foreword (which in keeping with what I believe this book will do to peoples' thinking, should peras be more appropriately described as a "Forward"). I enjoyed this book because I did not "enjoy" it in the usual sense. It brought out a lot of truths and facing-up to consequences in my own life, as radically different from Michael's in circumstances and events as one might imagine to be possible. How reading this book will affect You, the person holding this volume right now, is something that no one can predict. I truly hope it will bring up many deep thoughts and feelings inside you, and that those will result in positive and ultimately fulfilling discoveries and changes in your life and in the lives of those around you. If some of those feelings will be hard to handle, then go back to the pages of a book like this, "Invisible Pain," and to the Good Book Itself which has been given to us all by Our Ultimate Author. You will find inspiration, and strength, and then, hopefully, you will be receptive to how you can make changes that matter, that heal, that give renewed strength, for those in your lives.

Dr. Martin Joseph Dudziak, PhD
New York City, June 5, 2011

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Dear Dad,

How you came to know my mother and the relationship the two of you shared is a mystery to me. Although I have never seen your face, heard your voice, or have any true sense of the man you are, I feel it is imperative to write you. My desire is to write you a letter, one that will hopefully help me find out who I am, and where I lost myself wanting so much to know you. My mother never spoke of you, and to many in our family you have been sheltered in secrecy as if to protect a dark family secret. There have been times when I searched for you with the little information I had, but all along I've felt uncertain about whether or not the information was true. There have been so many lies told, so many inconsistencies in so many different stories. I find it difficult to believe that everyone is telling the truth, but I am closing that chapter of ceaseless questioning and doubts today with this letter.

I am a grown man now, with a family of my own. I have done for them – I have done my best to try to do for them - what you have not done for me. This is closure for me, and for my children a legacy of truth about what I know about my life. I hold no ill will towards you. I have finally come to terms with your non existence in my life. I have managed to survive the complex circumstances I faced in my early years without you, and still I'm blessed. I was forced to live with many insecurities, many dramatic life-changing situations, but somehow I survived. There is something about you that that has made me who I am, and for that I say, "Thank you." As far as I'm concerned my life began as a lie. If not by your doing totally, still some of the responsibility for that rests

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with you. That is how I feel and I'm just being honest and straight about it. Since we do not know each other, I find it imperative in my healing process to share these words with you about the life I've lived. There have been life-changing, life-twisting circumstances and people who have tried to fill in for you, but there was and can be no substitute for a real father's love and support.

Because of you, I have dedicated my life to ensure that history would not repeat itself with another generation of children being fatherless. For years I sacrificed my happiness to ensure theirs, and I've learned through it all any father is better than no father at all.

In the 1970's a feel good television program depicting the simple life focused on family values and loyalties. In today's society those loyalties are long gone and have been deleted from our way of thinking. One of my favorite shows of all time, one that's recently surfaced in syndication, is *The Waltons*. For a long time I desired to document my life and the struggles of my family like John Boy. My hopes were simply to share a light of hope to some, and a sense of understanding to others. Although the show does not depict anyone who looks at all like me, it does speak to me of the sacred loyalties of a family, loyalty and respect that one can only dream and wish for in times like these. We no longer have the love of God, family, and the appreciation of sticking together through the struggles as our way of life. The support of a father bonding with his son fascinated me. A family that found it honorable – more than merely out of a sense of “duty” - to take care of the aging parents and grandparents, that Walton family of make-believe

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resembled my family. The embracing of generational history and family values is something that builds character and fulfills the legacy of support and love for things far more valuable than the superficial, material things of this world.

Perhaps my reason for the writing of this book is not only to document my life but also to bring healing for something I had always wanted as a child but never had. I'm not saying that I was not loved, even "spoiled" to the extent of being spoiled in those days and our family's situation, nor that I was abused or lacking for anything essential. But I am a believer in finding the turning points in one's life. I felt it was important to define when and who inspired changes in my life and how those circumstances made me the person I am today. Because there have been so many people that have shaped my life for the good, and for the bad, I have become a very complex individual. Those who get to know me have no clue about who I really am inside, and in some respects I have come to the point of asking that very question of myself. Though not intentionally, I manage to isolate myself from the very people who have meant the most to me.

I guess it's true to say that everyone does indeed have a story. It's also true that the internal story does not always appear in the face and voice of those we know from day to day. As with many, my life is not only complex, but it also takes on characters, even a combination of personalities of what is in my mind, what I began to believe was real. As time continues on, the reality begins to set in, a revelation unfolds, and it all comes to show how my life took some seriously wrong paths. But through grace God has always

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provided, And that grace is part of what gives me the strength and perseverance to be writing to you now.

While watching a late episode of Oprah's Master Class, she made a statement that spoke straight to me. Paraphrasing her words, she said, *In order to truly be a true success, and happy within yourself you must be yourself. You can never succeed by wanting to, or trying to live your life through someone else, or like someone else.* As I continued to watch the show, I asked myself the perennial question, "Who am I?" It was at that moment I could not answer the question. I had no idea of where and when I lost myself. On the surface it appears to those around me that I am fully aware of who I am and what I want. I began to ask myself a series of questions, and realized I needed to crack the code of what defines me or else face a life of loneliness and emptiness.

In order to start cracking that code, to break through the barrier of mystery, I decided that my internal healing and my search for definition of personal reality could only happen if I were to write. For me, writing has always been my passion and the very thing that kept me from losing everything. So as I sit here, I'm going as far back as my mind will allow me to remember. Most of my stories were told to me by my grandmother and various family members and they are coming back to me, some like a dreamy fog, some like a waterfall, as I piece together the history of my life. I want my children to understand and know where they came from, and why they don't understand many of their father's behaviors. I want them to be able to look back with their children and understand who they are, and to never lose themselves though the years by not

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being thankful for whom they are, and the blessings they have. I have come to realize that no matter where you are in life, good or bad, up or down, there will always be someone who would love to change places with you. I can now say that I have taken things for granted, and the things for which I searched were just packaged in a different way that wasn't ideal for what I defined as success.

I had never learned or experienced Life. The Real Thing. I didn't know how to adjust to reality after years of living a life of make-believe. I wanted something different because I had not learned or experienced straight-up living, being just Me. In my mind, I am always thinking, planning, and anticipating the next move, and even the next words that come from those in my circles of friendship and acquaintance. It's this guarded behavior that has caused me to fight battles that were never supposed to be battles in the first place.

It is important to say, although maybe not definitively for every person, that when a man never meets his father, never learns who is his father, and from where he came, it is virtually impossible for him to be Real, to be his real self. Why? For me the answer is simple. A man needs and will forever yearn to know his past, so that he can appreciate the possibilities of his future – not someone else's but his own. When my peers would talk about their fathers, I would make up stories about mine. I would pretend to have things I did not have, to fit in with their world, to not be always on the outside looking in. I created a world of make-believe that after a period of time I came to believe in

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myself, as my reality, as my history. But it wasn't, and for that there have been so many consequences.

What began as simple kids' play and fun eventually became a pattern of lies and deceit. There is only one end to the truth, but a lie has no ending as one lie always leads to another. One can never live up to one's full potential if the "potential" is based on make-believe dreams of who you want to be, rather than the reality of who you are. So, it comes down to this. I hope from these pages of my life you will get to know the son you fathered with a young country girl from the little town of McBee, South Carolina, over 45 years ago.

Somewhere in the concrete jungle of New York City, almost a half century ago, marks the beginning of my life. It's in that jungle that certain decisions were made that would not only have a lasting impression on my life, but also have lasting implications on the lives I would create and affect for generations to come.

So in the words of a therapist: Let the healing begin.

Sincerely,

Your Son

Chapter One

Where It All Began

My earliest memories of life begin with living at Margaret Horton's Place, just off Hwy 151 going towards Jefferson, S.C. We later moved to the McLeod's Peach Farm in McBee, South Carolina. My birthplace was on another farm called Harmon Hill, also in McBee, S.C. My grandparents Elizabeth and Rufus Outen had always worked on farms, harvesting everything from cotton to peaches. Part of their compensation resulted in the owners of these various farms granting them shelter in one of the ragged farm houses scattered around the properties. There was never any running water or indoor plumbing, but it was shelter and a place to call home. One could hardly complain because in those days, you were just thankful to have a place to stay, and for the family to be always together. That's what my grandmother would often say.

My grandmother told me many wonderful stories about her life - some good, and some hurtful and sad. She told me the story of my life, how I was born, about her struggles in life and about a wonderful wealth of great family history I want to make sure lives on forever.

Today it is rare that one has the opportunity to live with and get to know one's great-grandmother. Well, I did and I am glad. Grandma Morgan was a woman of courage, and unlike many in those days, she was a woman of financial stability. She lived in a

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home not owned by the white farmer or businessperson. My great-grandparents were one of the few to have a deeded property. Realize that in the mid 1800's and into the early 1900's blacks rarely owned anything other than the clothes on their backs, and a few furnishings for the home. My great grandfather Moody died before I was born. My great-grandparents' life began in Lee County, South Carolina. This is where my grandmother was born. They would later relocate their family to Hartsville, South Carolina and build a home. It was also quite rare in those days to have indoor plumbing, and running water, too, but they did. Not to mention, the home was inside the city limits, and not off in the back woods or on a dirt road. A rarity for black families in those days. I'm not certain that the home always had these luxuries – and to use they were luxuries indeed - but they were present as far back as I can remember as a child. I remember well that great-grandma had a telephone, because it was there that, my grandmother would make her calls for business, or to confer with family with whom she did not get to speak to during the week. Most of her brothers and sisters lived in the northern states, but when her local brothers Uncle Jesse and Uncle Major knew she was in town, you could rest assured that they would show up for hours of stories and good laughs. Although not habitable today, the property is still owned by the family.

The family home was simple by design. The house was white with black shutters and had a full front porch. I can remember many Saturday afternoon gatherings of our family on that front porch. As with many homes of that era, there were no hallways. As the illustration of the floor plan shows, you enter the home on the right side. This was the living room, where there was a fireplace. Just beyond that was the kitchen, and

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another bedroom. To the left of the house off the living room was the master bedroom, and just off that was another bedroom, and then the small bathroom. The back yard was small, so most activities would take place either in the driveway on the right side where there were large shade trees, or over on the front porch. The big shade tree at the entrance of the driveway where we sat and played when we would visit still stands today, a sentinel to the generations.

On the corner of the street, on the left side of my great-grandmother's house was a little corner store which an old woman owned. The store was in front and she lived in the back portion of the building. We loved to go over there and buy cookies, candy, and the occasional ice cream cone. I can still remember the big cookie jars on the counters and the excitement of reaching into jars to get many cookies your few pennies could buy. We would be in pure heaven if we could trade enough empty bottles to buy a cold drink from the icebox.

Because my grandparents did not own a car, they relied on the generosity of many family and friends. Before some of my grandmother's children would marry and have transportation to help her get around, she would usually find herself and the family catching a ride to town and to church with long time family friends like the Murphy's, Cousin Boss, and others the like. My grandparents struggled financially their entire lives. I can never recall a time when there was enough money, or when there was not a concern of how many of the basic essentials were going to be taken care of. My grandfather Rufus, although a very hardworking man, had a major drinking problem. In

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many respects his battle with alcohol would cause years of internal and external suffering for the entire Outen family. He would work hard Monday through Friday, but if my grandmother did not stay close to him on payday, he would throw away his entire paycheck. Friday evenings through Sunday mornings would prove to be a living hell. This is when his relentless outbursts would unfold from the countless bottles of alcohol he would consume. In a drunken rage, I heard him say and do practically anything you can imagine. My grandmother never drank, and if she had I think it would be fair to say that she and her children may not have made it through those tough days. Though no one is perfect, she was a force to be reckoned with. She was and always will be the best in my eyes. She was well-respected in the community, and she always walked with her head high and with tremendous pride regardless of her circumstances.

Although I can remember the tough times, rarely can I recall her complaining or placing blame for our situation on anyone. I never knew how bad things were, or how poor we were, perhaps because there were so many in the same situation around us. We were poor by every measure, but her pride and dignity camouflaged it from our sight. My grandfather was also a proud man, but I believe (though it is only my assumption today as a grown man) that the treatment he received working in the fields during all those years of discrimination and segregation had a tremendous impact on his life. This is an important point, one with which I will deal that later in coming chapters.

Chapter Two

A Miracle or a Mistake?

Sometime in 1963 the youngest of my grandparent's children, my aunt Mildred, entered school. This meant that my grandmother would be home alone during the day, and she began to slip into what she described in later years as being a time of major depression and loneliness. During this time, my grandfather was exerting an extremely psychological and physical pattern of abusive behavior. There was nothing nor anyone to break the agony of the day. There was no one to show her love, so she prayed for anything that might lessen the anger and cruelty of my grandfather's relentless rage.

Sadly through the day she would sit at home and weep. She began to play and talk to life size dolls as if they were real. She said that she felt so alone, unwanted, unloved at times and simply didn't know what to do. Even though there were still children in the home, something had changed. She was in the late stages of menopause and knew she could not have any more children. She would explain and go into detail the abuse and torture she would was going through and that she had been experiencing for years. This abuse contributed to the emotions that brought an enormous amount of instability to her psychological behavior. It also demonstrated the penetrating agony of a broken heart. this stands out so clearly in my memory to this very day.

A woman of strong faith, she came to the conclusion that the only thing she could do was to pray. Always having a very close relationship with God, with strong spiritual

convictions, she believed in the power of prayer. When all else failed she could always find the healing comforts of God in her secret closet. Accepting that at her age there would be no more children, she still desired of the Lord that he would grant her some company during the day. She needed someone, or something to help heal her mind. This was her constant prayer she would tell me. She would receive this little spiritual magazine “Life Study Fellowship” which still comes to our home today as her inspiration. In this magazine are testimonies, and poems. There are also three prayers you are to read everyday. There are morning, afternoon, and evening prayers that I can never remember her failing to take the time for each day, to read and meditate on the things she desired of God. She always planned her life around these prayers for as long as I can remember.

Many of the older children that were still living at home began to have concern about her. One particular story would be collaborated by my aunts and uncles on many occasions. This story was one that for some reason always gained traction at most family gatherings. They thought it strange, as did she, to constantly ask God for another child when it was obvious that she could not have any more children, yet she refused to lose hope. She always had faith that God was going to answer her prayer. It came a time when my mother Doretha, after working in the peach fields in the summer with her brothers and sisters like so many others wanted to escape the farm life of the deep south. Even though she had met a man while working there, and things were somewhat alright, she made the decision to quit school. She wanted to move to New York and live with my grandmother’s sisters and brothers around the vicinity of Roosevelt, and Long

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Island, New York and search for work. Tired of working in the fields, she wanted to see something new, to experience a different way of life. My mother was quite adventurous and ahead of her time in many respects. A very smart woman, she realized that her true potential could not be achieved working in the peach fields of South Carolina. She simply wanted more than that, and felt there was so much more she wanted to see. During those days, it was not unusual for there to be advertisements for work in the north in southern newspapers and magazines. This is how many black southerners migrated from the South in search of a life outside of working on the farms, hoping against hope to escape the harsh racial segregation and all the painful discrimination practices of the South. It was in one of these publications that my mother answered an ad to become a nanny. Through some process, and planning the family sent a small travel allowance and a ticket for her to come to New York. This would be the break she had been hoping would come.

Eventually, after all in the family were satisfied, and the advertised position had been vetted to be a legitimate opportunity, arrangements were satisfactory to my grandmother. She gave her blessings and allowed my mother to accept this opportunity. Eager to explore, and to create the best life she could for herself, she left home for the big city. This was a major step for my mother, and also for my grandmother to watch her first-born daughter leave home at such a young age with nothing more than a dream and a prayer. It was decided that she would stay with her Aunt Pearlene, my grandmother's sister up north, until she was settled in with her new job. As time went on, my mother would eventually find solitude working as a nanny for a somewhat

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wealthy family in New York. Soon she moved in with the family, and aided in the rearing of the families two young daughters. Excited to be there, she often worked on her days off, taking them to the park and to movies. They paid her well, gave her room and board, and treated her as one of the family. She began to come into her own, venture out, and make friends as she explored the fast-paced life of the city. She began to send money home, as was customary in those days to help the family. Life seemed, from all accounts to me to be going well. According to my grandmother she appeared happy with her life. She was content with her job and adjusting well to her new life. My grandmother continued to suffer from depression, bu