

# The Naked Truth

*Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute.  
What you can do, or think you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.*

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*Faust: Prelude at the Theatre*

**H**ow do you feel about yourself when you are standing all alone and naked in front of your bathroom mirror, looking yourself right in the eye, when all the facades and pretenses are removed? I am speaking here metaphorically, seeing yourself stripped down to the bare essence of who you are. Perhaps you feel great; you really like yourself. Or maybe your feelings are mixed or just the opposite. There may be times when you don't like who you are and find it difficult to believe in yourself. If the latter sentiments are closer to your reality, this book has value for you.

I like myself; in fact, I feel pretty good about myself. The road to these feelings, however, was not a straight path. As you shall see, I encountered incredible twists and turns getting here. I have come to terms with my situation and am at peace.

Life has not been easy for me. I've had a turbulent family life, and for forty years, I have adjusted to gradually declining vision that has forced me to reconsider my original career plans and to develop a new concept of myself as a partially sighted person. In addition, my body developed a problem with its ability to heal from injuries, and at times these became so debilitating that it was almost impossible for me to work.

Faced with an increasing number of obstacles, I could have resigned myself to the situation, but I decided to fight. Throughout the struggle, I maintained a positive attitude, and that has made the difference. One of my strongest resources is determination. I just don't quit. I push on and stubbornly refuse to be defeated.

## Defying the Menace of Red-Hot Coals

Several years ago, I accepted an invitation to accompany a group of friends to a fire walk in Lincoln, a few miles west of Boston.

In a fire walk, people walk across hot coals in their bare feet. It is an ancient and widely practiced ritual among many native societies throughout the world; it is usually conducted by a shaman or holy medical practitioner. Its purpose varies from learning to confront fear to achieving an altered state of consciousness. Many fire walkers hope to gain the ability to endure and overcome arduous experiences. It is definitely an exercise in courage.

When I accepted the invitation, I was not planning to take part in the fire walk myself, but thought it would be fun to watch. Me, walk across hot coals in my bare feet? Are you kidding? Not a chance! For me it was more of a social gathering.

The fire walk took place at an upper middle class suburban home with a big yard and lots of trees. Here is how it happened.

When my companions and I arrive, we join a group of fifteen old friends who welcome us as they sit quietly in a large room. It is a comfortable space with natural wood all around and exposed beams in the ceiling. We spend a long time here talking about the fire walk and singing over and over again an inspiring song.

As the discussion progresses, the thought occurs to me that I might like to try the fire walk myself after all. If the others can do it, why can't I? How risky can it be? I rationalize that the coals might not be so hot that it will be dangerous.

After a couple of hours, we go out to look at the roaring fire that is being prepared for our escapade. It contains huge blazing logs, and the flames reach halfway to the sky, or so it seems. As we approach, the sensation of heat against my face is overwhelming, and I am intimidated. At that point, I change my mind and decide *not* to take part. I haven't told anyone that I will participate, so it isn't as though I am chickening out in public. Relieved, I tell myself that I am just coming to my senses, and after all, I don't need to prove my courage to anyone else.

I find myself retreating from the challenge as I think I have a justifiable reason to steer clear of the fire walk. I could be burned! Isn't this what we all do to talk ourselves out of facing a fear? We justify our actions with well-sounding excuses. Can you recall a time when you reacted in a similar way?

The group goes back inside and resumes the discussion and song. After another hour of listening to the others, I am buoyed by their courage and spirit. I reconsider my participation. I will decide when we are again in front of the embers.

When we return outside, the fire has died down, and the leader of the group spreads the red-hot coals with a rake. They still look very hot, but I am encouraged when a light rain begins to fall. Through the group's support, the ebbing of the flames, and the rain, I feel my decision weighing on the side of "Go for it!"

Five participants walk across the hot coals. Reassured that they don't recoil in pain, I prepare to join them. As I listen to the crackling of the hot embers, I wonder if my feet will burn. I rub them in the wet grass for a tiny bit of protection and get ready to follow the others. With adrenaline flowing and my heart beating rapidly, I step onto the bed of coals. I experience a sensation of heat but feel no pain. After four quick steps, I am across. It is a relief to again reach the grass, which feels refreshingly cool. A moment later, a friend asks if I will repeat the walk with him. I figure I have done it once, so I can do it again. I agree, and we cross together without pain. Most of my friends also do the fire walk, and it goes well for everyone. Afterward, I was elated that my courage had triumphed over my fear.

I learned an important lesson that evening. I had taken a risk; I had confronted my fear. The outcome had not been the dire result I had imagined. As a consequence, whenever I am faced with a major challenge I ask myself, "Is this going to be any tougher than walking on hot coals?"

How about you? Do you ever feel as if you are facing a bed of hot coals? When you are confronted with an obstacle, do you avoid it by making excuses that justify your decision, or do you face it head on? Are you shy and uncomfortable being assertive either at home or in the workplace, and do you have a difficult time confronting people? Are you able to be loving and caring toward those to whom you are close, or do you keep them emotionally at a distance? Do you have difficulty relating to people and so feel isolated and alone? Are you able to be open, honest, and vulnerable with others?

Certain qualities can be called upon to meet life's challenges and cause breakthrough experiences. Courage is one of these. When faced with danger or hardship, approaching life boldly rather than withdrawing from it empowers us. It strengthens our self-esteem and builds our confidence, which makes us more effective. Do you have the courage to live life as fully as you would like?

Challenges require solutions, and big challenges require extra creativity in arriving at them. The key is perseverance. If a solution is not immediately apparent, you have to keep working on the problem, and an answer will emerge. It may not be the answer you anticipated,

but you have to accept the reality of the situation at hand and move on from there.

Christopher Reeve, the actor who suffered a spinal cord injury in a fall from a horse, is an admirable example of a man who has persevered in the face of extraordinary circumstances. His initial despair was embraced by love from his family and replaced with a newfound hope and optimism. His courage and determination are a source of inspiration to us all. He later was able to step beyond his own situation and find meaning in his work to assist others with spinal cord injuries.

Most of us will not be so severely tested. Our struggles, however mundane by comparison, have significant meaning in our own lives. Reeve's example inspires courage when we face our own afflictions. It is important to remember that with many dilemmas, a satisfactory resolution can be discovered when we persevere in seeking one.

## Moving Beyond Limitations Leads to New Healing Techniques

Do you remember when you last grappled with an especially tough problem, where a solution was so critical that you were absolutely determined to prevail? This book is the story of such a struggle, my personal struggle. In time, my perseverance was rewarded when I discovered some incredible techniques for healing. I believe these will be helpful for many people. But I am getting ahead of myself.

For me it all began in the early seventies when I started to deal with some severe personal difficulties. On the surface, they included debilitating injuries to my left hip and forearms, recurring stomach discomfort, and eventually a chronic case of the flu. On a deeper emotional level, they were manifestations of profound psychological wounds.

While extremely frustrating in themselves, these afflictions might have been bearable. What I found almost intolerable was my inability to recover. Although I tried everything I could think of to heal, nothing seemed to make a difference. Grappling with these physical infirmities for more than thirty years contributed substantially to my emotional growth. In almost every case, however, a complete healing continued to elude me.

It felt as though a deep unconscious part of me would not allow illness or injuries to heal. Fearing I would never overcome these

difficulties, I was even more desperate to resolve them. Along the way, I became uncompromisingly determined to restore my health. I had no idea how to repair my severely damaged healing capability, but I figured that there had to be a way and I was determined to find it.

In the early nineties, one of the basic reasons for my medical problems gradually dawned on me. Due to several difficult childhood experiences, I had long felt angry and resentful toward my parents. I was now forced to come to grips with these intense feelings if I ever hoped to resolve the problems.

1994 was a watershed year for me. Experimenting at home with existing methods for expressing anger and resentment, I stumbled upon one that, once tailored to suit my needs, worked incredibly well. This self-styled healing technique enabled me to release almost all of these emotions. In addition, through enhancing certain well-known cathartic approaches, I also healed most of the residual effects of several earlier traumas. Eventually I succeeded in healing most of my health problems and became more at peace with myself.

This work, much of which took place over a period of several weeks, was a series of emotional catharses. On each occasion, I felt that I was undergoing a special healing, followed by a deep feeling of relaxation in the pit of my stomach. I had never imagined that such peace was possible! This emotional healing had such a profound effect on me that I felt impelled to share these experiences. This book is the story of my path to accomplish this transformation, and the remarkable things I learned about healing along the way.

## The Structure of the Book

For those of you who like to know the structure in advance, the book is organized into four parts. Part I is about a couple of challenges I faced and some personal qualities that helped me to meet them. Part II deals with emotional difficulties from childhood events and family relationships. Although you might find these painful to read, they lay the foundation for understanding how the deep emotional pain I experienced affected me. This will help you appreciate the power of the processes I go on to explain later in the book. The third part describes a critical challenge that I struggled to overcome. This effort contributed powerful ideas about restoring emotional health.

Part IV is very much about growth and healing. I explain the Anger Technique and the Healing Transformation, two of the most important concepts in the book. This is followed by the Grieving

Process, another of the core methodologies for healing. I used it to successfully overcome the lingering effects of several traumatic experiences.

The main text is followed by five appendices. Appendix A includes captivating anecdotes about my parents' families. Appendices B, C, and D contain references to helpful books and cassette tapes. Appendix E contains my victory list in narrative form.

## My Hope for You: A Joyous Healing Journey

The processes described in this book have been immensely beneficial to me. The techniques presented are powerful. They have the potential to facilitate major healing experiences. I have shared my story with you in the hope that my example will inspire you to accomplish a similar healing in your life.

If you are not as physically and emotionally healthy as you would like to be, this book can show you how to achieve significant *emotional* healing and find a deeper sense of peace. I hope it provides you with a sturdy guide on your path to better health. I wish you a joyous healing journey.

Fred Craver, Ph.D.