



**A JOURNEY
OF
BEGINNINGS**

The Making of a Life

JAMES M. CAMPBELL

Dedication

*Dedicated to those who shaped
the wondrous life I have lived*

This memoir is dedicated first to my mom and dad who formed my early years and gave me a foundation that stood the test of the years and their challenges. Second, it is dedicated to all the Order:Ecumenical colleagues with whom I lived and worked for many years. They are too numerous for me to mention by name, but much of what I was able to do and much of what I learned in this life was made possible by their presence. I owe them a profound debt of gratitude. Third, it is dedicated to all the amazing people I was privileged to meet and often worked with as I moved around the world. Whether they were Patriarchs or residents in a jungle village, they too taught me profound lessons about life and its living. Finally, it is dedicated to Robin and his family who have made it possible for me to live here in Colombia and have given me the space to write this book.

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For permission requests email James M. Campbell:

jimcampbell.facilitation@gmail.com

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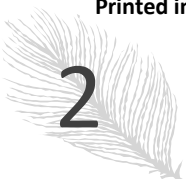


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A Prologue

The Luminous Interval

*We come from a dark abyss,
we end in a dark abyss,
and we call the luminous interval life.* —Nikos Kazantzakis

*As every blossom fades and all youth sinks
into old age, so every life's design,
each flower of wisdom, every good, attains
its prime and cannot last forever.* —Herman Hesse

*Is anyone afraid of change?
Why, what can take place without change?
What then is more pleasing to the universal nature?
And canst thou take a bath
unless the wood undergoes a change?
And canst thou be nourished
unless the food undergoes a change?
And can anything that is useful be accomplished
without change?
Dost thou not see then that for thyself also
to change is just the same,
and equally necessary for the universal nature?*

—Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

I read these quotes in the late 1960s, and they have been part of my being since those days. I have sought to write the story of my journey between Nikos Kazantzakis' two dark abysses; to write about how I have lived the passing of *every life's design* and embraced the change that is the very nature of life; to write about the never-ending struggle to create a life that is true to my vocational vision; to write about how I have sought to make *the luminous interval* truly luminous.

I have not dwelt on the many failures and shortcomings that have been part of my life. I have not explored the

times when in my frustration, anger, and despair I violated the humanity of another person. As Paul writes in Romans:

***For the good that I want, I do not do,
but I practice the very evil that I do not want.***—Romans 7:19

I have lived a far from blameless life, but this book is not about those times. Those moments do not create life, and I am seeking to write about the making of my life.

By sharing stories and events that were part of my experience at a particular time in my life, I have strived to paint verbal pictures of the life I was living and then to share my reflections on how that time informed and shaped me and the life I have led.

All of us must use the stuff of our self and our experiences to create our life. Each of us must live Nikos Kazantzakis' ***luminous interval*** to the best of our ability, and in living it make our life. No one can judge another's life, nor can we ourselves judge the life we have created. Judging is best left to the Mystery of Existence and the ages. All any of us can do as we live our creation is to remember the question that was carved in the beam over the blacksmith's forge at the beginning of the movie, *Kingdom of Heaven*:

What man is a man who does not make the world better?

I wrote this memoir because Robin, my Colombian friend, who invited me into his home and to be part of his family, kept telling me I should. I did not set out to create what I have created. I thought I would write a few pages to keep him quiet, and that would be that. But, as things occasionally do, it took on a life of its own, and because it was teaching me so much about myself and my life, I just kept going. And I share it with the hope that it might enable your own reflection and be useful to you in creating ***the luminous interval*** of your life.



An Introduction

A Moment of Genuine Knowing

*At life's each call the heart must be prepared
to take its leave and to commence afresh
courageously and with no hint of grief
submit itself to other, newer ties.*

*A magic dwells in each beginning and
protecting us it tells us how to live.* —Herman Hesse

I am writing this introduction in November, 2013 and am in the first month of the latest beginning in my life. On October 30 I left Brussels after living there for 32 years and moved to live in Colombia. A few months ago when I was telling people what I was going to do, I said that I felt like I was jumping off a cliff with no assurances about where or how I would land, but that I had done this sort of thing before in my life, and the landing was always a soft landing, so here I go. I really do believe that

*A magic dwells in each beginning and
protecting us it tells us how to live.*

In reflecting upon my journey, I have come to realize that my life is marked by a series of beginnings and experiences that, given my roots, are exceptional. If, as a young teenager growing up in the hills of western Pennsylvania in a working-class family, I had seen a movie of my life as it has been, I would have dismissed it as a fairy tale. None of us knows our destiny, or where history will conspire to bring us. At the same time, we are not victims of history. Our life is ours to create, and this is the story of those moments when I made a decision that created my life and the experiences that flowed from those decisions.

This poem has lived with me since I was a teenager:



The Road Not Taken

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

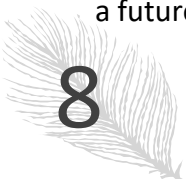
*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sign
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.* —Robert Frost

This is the story of how I have taken the road less travelled on occasion, and that has indeed ***made all the difference.***

At the age of 22 I found my vocation, and thus most of this story is about my commitment to that vocation and the giving of my life to its fulfillment.

I believe that everyone has a vocation, and that the real tragedy of our time is that so many people never realize their vocation or have the chance to fulfill it. I believe neither in chance nor in predestination. However, I do believe that occasions arise in our lives that seem to open a future that is both opportune and logical in terms of our



life at that moment. In addition, they seem to be a step forward in the fulfillment of our vocation. The challenge is to recognize those occasions for what they are and then to step into the future they open.

I think that the key to recognizing those future-opening occasions in our lives is to be found in a person's profound sense of vocation. In a sense a vocation is an intense vision of what one's life is about. When a person is living out their vocation, something takes place like what Peter Senge, *et. al.* talk about in *Presence, Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*. Among their key insights:

- ***Only when people begin to see from within the forces that shape their reality and to see their part in how those forces might evolve does vision become powerful.***
- ***Everything else is just a vague hope.***
- ***In a sense, real visions are uncovered, not manufactured.***
- ***Perhaps the least noticed and most important capacity [is the] capacity to tap into and focus a larger intention.***
- ***[They] emphasize again and again the power of crystallizing intention, once you arrive at a place of genuine 'knowing.'***
- ***Intention is not a powerful force, it is the only force.***
- ***When operating from this larger intention, the standard model of rational decisionmaking gives way to a different process— simply doing what obviously needs to be done.***
- ***Action arises as a spontaneous product of the whole.***
- ***If you know what's right, you don't have to make decisions.***



*When you know what's right,
it's just there for you, and you do it.*

- *It is not the grandeur of the vision that matters
but what it accomplishes.*
- *In the simplest sense,
a vision is simply an image
of what we're seeking to create.*

We do not **manufacture** our vocation. We discover or discern it. When you are living your vocation, the **place of genuine knowing** that they speak of is revealed because of your grounding in your vocational vision. When the future-opening occasion that one is experiencing becomes a **place of genuine knowing**, what needs to be done becomes obvious, your intention is crystallized, and

*If you know what's right,
you don't have to make decisions.
When you know what's right,
it's just there for you, and you do it.*

I want to share the moment in my life when I discovered my life's vocation. This event was when I arrived at **a place of genuine knowing**. And my vocation became not just an intention in my life but **the only force**. From that day until this day and until the day I die what took place on that day has been, is, and will be what my life is about.

Soon after the New Year in January of 1963, at the age of 22, I arrived at the Methodist Church-sponsored Iquique English College in Iquique, Chile. I was there as a short-term missionary of The Methodist Church to spend the next three years teaching in the high school of the College. However, the College was in the midst of the Summer holidays, so I was encouraged to travel south and visit some of the work of The Methodist Church.

An Introduction

A Moment of Genuine Knowing

After visiting Santiago and then going to visit the large farm run by the church as a demonstration and experimental project, I boarded the train and traveled to the end of the line in Puerto Montt. I spent a few days there and then boarded the train for the journey north to Santiago where I would take a plane back to Iquique. Early in the morning the train left Puerto Montt, and a few hours later we stopped at a rural station. This was obviously a daily occurrence, since the platform was crowded with vendors selling food, and people streamed off the train to make purchases.

Not wanting anything, I stayed on the train and soon returned to reading my book. Just as I heard the conductor's whistle blow, signaling that the train was preparing to leave, there was a hard, incessant knocking on the window right beside my head. I turned and looked straight into the eyes of a little boy—maybe six or seven years old. We were eye to eye, and he was pounding on the window with one fist while he held his other hand palm out, indicating that I should give him some money. We were eye to eye, since he was riding on another boy's shoulders. His dirty face was framed with bright red hair, and the pleading in his eyes still haunts me.

I sat there, not knowing what to do and not being able to look away. The window did not open, and people were pushing their way back aboard the train in preparation for its departure. Suddenly the train lurched, and we began to depart. The boy moved alongside the train, and he continued to stare at me and pound on the window. Eventually we picked up speed, and he was no longer able to keep up.

I don't really remember much else about the rest of the journey. I know that I did not return to my book. I could

not stop thinking about the look in the eyes of that dirty-faced, red-haired boy. By the time we arrived in Santiago I knew that I did not want to live in a world where little boys had to pound on train windows to survive. I knew that the rest of my life had to be about creating a world where that did not happen. I did not know what that would look like practically, but I knew that whatever I did, it had to be about that.

Those couple of moments were my moment of ***genuine knowing***, and in that moment the intention of my life was crystallized. This moment revealed my vocational vision, and for over fifty years it has guided my life. Hardly a day goes by when I do not relive those moments. They are as real and as vivid to me today as they were on that train ride to Santiago.

In the fifty-some years since that day I have done many things in many parts of the globe, but everything has been about that dirty-faced, red-haired boy and the millions like him. I have no illusions about what I have been able to accomplish, but if nothing else, I have worked to make sure that nothing I did contributed to making life harder for them. This is my vocation, and since the age of 22 I have had only one vision of what my life had to be about. In a sense everything that happened in my life before that day was preparing me for that encounter, and since that day everything has been informed by that encounter.