



## My Mountain-Top Retreat

"The horizon leans forward, offering you space to place new steps of change."

Maya Angelou

"On the Pulse of Morning"

Maya Angelou, one of my favorite authors, expresses so well my new, peaceful, serene setting. I am finding space to accept those changes which await me. This third newsletter is being written from a log cabin on top of a mountain high up in the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. Jack Penn, a poet I like a lot, extends Angelou's thoughts with these words: "One of the secrets of life is to make stepping stones out of stumbling blocks." Many times in my life I have not known how to get over the stumbling blocks to find the stepping stones on the other side. While nestled in my log cabin, I am hoping to move past those stumbling blocks and find the space to savor the changes that are there for me on the other side.

While writing my second book, *Lessons from the Crossroads: Finding My Authentic Path*, I had the opportunity to travel to log cabins across the country to spend time reflecting and writing. From those experiences, I have learned these settings provide the perfect environment for me to do my best writing. A few weeks ago I discovered this particular log cabin. As I prayed to God to show me His plan for my life and give me the courage to follow it, my path led me to the Blue Ridge Mountains. So, I packed up my bags and made the move here from Suburban Chicago. I know without a doubt He wants me right here at this point along my journey.

My cabin is surrounded by 2 and 1/2 acres of woods. As I sit on the upper deck, I can see large mountains off in the distance. On this October 11th, the fall colors are brilliant from all angles of the deck. Having been here a week, I do not even know where my closest neighbors are. But, I know they are at least 2 and 1/2 acres away. This morning I built a fire in the large stone fireplace in my office. The logs are crackling and the fire provides a warm relief from the 43 degree temperature outside. Throughout the cabin I can smell that wonderful, musty aroma of burning wood.

A few years ago, I discovered that "home" is not necessarily a physical place, but rather all the feelings I carry in my heart about *finding* home. In his book *Going Home*, author Robert Raines told his story of being called out of his life and its structures to find out who he really was. Raines said, "But, what if obeying our calling means to respond to the new energies churning out of our deepest integrity? Obeying our calling might mean having the courage...to obey that inner yearning calling us to leave home and go out on a wilderness journey." In the Bible (*Hebrews 11:8a*) we find the story of Abraham and Sara. When Abraham was 70, he and Sara were called by God to go to places unknown. I can hear some of his friends saying, "Abe, you stupid jerk, you've got it made here. Why in the world do you want to leave?" Nevertheless, Abraham and Sara left. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go..." They "went out not knowing" (my definition of faith) what lay ahead. Since I've asked God to show me His plan for my life, I'm going out not knowing what this adventure holds for me.

Living in a log cabin in the setting mine provides has been a dream of mine since I finished writing *Lessons From the Crossroads* in January, 2007. For now, I have found a perfect match between the feelings of home I carry in my heart and a physical place. Now that I'm here, my current dream has been fulfilled. However, in his book *The Dream Giver*, author Bruce Wilkinson suggested that realizing one dream often leads us to a larger dream we could not have known at the beginning of our journey. I have no idea where future paths may lead me, and not knowing is the excitement of the journey.

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## The Adventures of Altair the Ant

I'm going to share with you a story about an ant named Altair. One of the most exciting reasons for sharing this story is that you get to write the ending. I've used the story of Altair many times with attendees of my seminars and workshops, as well as my graduate students. Every time I share this story I read and hear some of the most unbelievably creative endings. What will you write?

One day, Altair was assigned a task that took the ant outside the anthill for the very first time. The task was to bring back a dead grasshopper killed by the elders in a raid the previous day.

The young champion set out, and upon exiting the anthill was profoundly impressed and even shocked at the size of the outside world. Altair had heard tales that the world was vast, but never had the ant experienced such massive dimensions.

As the search continued, the ant carefully followed detailed directions, but a barrier was soon encountered that seemed insurmountable. Altair decided to crawl under this obstacle. Upon so doing, the ant was confronted with another shock! The outside world was immensely larger than could ever have been dreamed. It seemed the anthill was located under a bushel basket and what was thought to be the outside world was only the area covered by the basket. Altair realized there was no way to have fully understood this environment until the larger world had been approached. Only now did Altair understand that the anthill had been covered by the bushel basket.

Because the grasshopper had not yet been found, Altair continued on until encountering another barrier that could not be burrowed under. The ant was forced to retrace some steps, then zig zag in several directions until an opening appeared. Once on the other side of the barrier, Altair was once again shocked with the realization that the bushel basket was located within a greenhouse and that what was thought to be the big, wide world was actually only a small greenhouse.

Now that Altair was outside this greenhouse.....

Okay, what did Altair do next? Finish the story by letting your creative juices flow freely. I hope you will share with me your ending via email. As I said, I always love reading those enjoyable endings and I learn a lot by reading them. I look forward to sharing some of your endings to this story in future editions of *The Lesson Guy*.

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### **Sittin' on the Porch at the Crossroads**

Each of you has a story inside, just crying to see the light of day. When I'm talking with audiences about storytelling, I often have them write a short story about themselves. Many of them have the same initial thought, as you might: "How do I get started?"

I share with them some "story starters," some of the same starters I'm going to share with you. With these prompts, reflect on your earliest memories and then move forward in time. Our entire life is our library where personal memories are the stories we are looking for.

Please email your story to me and watch for the stories in future issues of *The Lesson Guy*.

- Can you remember a time you got into trouble for something you had already been told not to do?
  
- Can you remember a night your parents never found out about?
  
- Can you remember a time when you got lost, or separated from your companions?
  
- Can you remember a time when you totally forgot an important date or appointment?
  
- Can you remember a time when you learned something from a child?
  
- Take us with you when you had to move from one location to another.
  
- Take us with you to a movie when you were a child or a teenager?
  
- Take us on a visit to your favorite childhood store.
  
- Take us on a visit to your childhood doctor's office.

**Pay It Forward** - submitted by Tracy Thompson

Sue is the ultimate Cub fan. She's the kind of person that waits in line for hours to get autographs from the players, attend the annual Cub Convention, and knows just about everything there is to know about the team. She has more Cub paraphernalia than I've ever seen. Sue has supported the Cubs better than anyone I know. You can imagine her excitement when not only did the Cubs win their division this year, but Sue was able to get tickets to a playoff game. Sue planned to take her grandson along, as she often does. Talk about a dream season!

Gail, my mother-in-law, was another huge Cub fan, as is the rest of the family. Gail spent the past year battling cancer. Knowing the great Cub fan she was, Gail's colleagues wanted her to have the opportunity to attend a game with her family, so they all chipped in to make this possible. Gail lost her battle with cancer the first week of September. She never made it to that game. When the Cubs made the playoffs, my father-in-law suggested we all go to the game, as Gail would have wanted us to. Try as we might, we just couldn't get tickets. I had hoped we would have been able to take him to a game, but it just wasn't going to happen.

I was sharing this story with some of my colleagues at lunch one day. Little did I know that Sue had overheard. The next day at work, Sue presented me with her three tickets. She wanted my husband and me to take my father-in-law to the game. I told Sue I couldn't take these tickets, but she insisted. I wrote Sue a check and she handed it back saying she wasn't going to cash it; she just simply wanted to do this for my father-in-law. The tears came to my eyes as I was overcome with her generosity and caring.

I shared this story with one of my friends, telling her I wish there was something I could do in return for this totally unselfish gift. Her response was, "Pay it forward. Someday you'll have the opportunity to do something for someone else to make their day a little brighter."

As you may know, the Cubs lost that game, their season-ending game - another season soon to be forgotten. But Sue's gift will never be forgotten. Her act of kindness added a bright spot for my father-in-law. As we sat in Wrigley Field that day, I knew Gail was looking down and smiling.

### **Thoughts from *The Lesson Guy***

Such a wonderful story of how Sue gave away something that meant so much to her. Having lived in Chicago for 27 years, I know the loyalty true Cub fans have toward their team. The advice Tracy's friend shared with her, "Pay it forward," summarizes this moving story. Being of service to others and helping them whether they ask or not, is a lesson I am still learning. At times my old "me first" behavior surfaces. Did Tracy, for one second, feel she had a right to those tickets just because she and her husband wanted to do something meaningful for her father-in-law? Most assuredly she didn't. She tried to refuse the tickets; she tried to pay for them. Nothing worked, so all she could do was say, "Thank you." When we do pay it forward, those selfless acts come back to us many times over. I know Tracy will always share her gifts with others just because of what Sue did for her and her family.

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## **If the World Had a Front Porch**

A dear friend, Paul Mangino, called me the other morning from Chicago. Paul has read my first book, *Lessons from the Porch: A Gathering Place for Telling Our Stories*. He just finished listening to a song on the radio by country singer Tracy Lawrence. Paul said he thought of me as he listened. I share the lyrics with you because those words did, in fact, give me the gift of memories of the joy of telling our stories while sittin' on the front porch.

*It was where my Mama sat on that old swing with her crochet.*

*It was where Granddaddy taught me how to cuss and how to pray.*

*It was where we made our own ice cream those sultry summer nights, where the bulldog had her puppies, and us brothers had our fights.*

*There were many nights I'd sit right there and look out at the stars, to the shout of a distant whippoorwill or the hum of a passing car.*

*It was where I first got up the nerve to steal me my first kiss, and it's where I learned to play guitar and pray I had the gift.*

*(Chorus)*

*If the world had a front porch like we did back then, we'd still have our problems, but we'd all be friends.*

*Treating your neighbor like he's your next of kin wouldn't be gone with the wind.*

*If the world had a front porch, like we did back then.*

*Purple hulls and pintos, I've shelled more than my share; as lightening bugs and crickets danced in the evening air.*

*And like a beacon that old yellow bulb, it always led me home.*

*Somehow Mama always knew just when to leave it on.*

If you grew up in the fifties and sixties (and even later) perhaps you too can remember those summer nights just sittin' on the front porch and enjoyin' your world while there.

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## Lessons Learned Along My Journey

In this section, I share thoughts from two of the thirty-one lessons found in *Lessons from the Porch* and *Lessons from the Crossroads*. Please know as I share these Lessons with you, I'm also sharing them with myself. Why do I share these lessons with myself? The lessons are my lessons; however I still have a long journey down my path of understanding the full meaning of my own lessons. Sound funny? I have changed as a person since sharing these lessons in my books. I sincerely hope I never get to the point that I can say I have "learned" my lessons, and I love the fact that the lessons will continue to have new meaning for me.

### Lesson 9 *The Porch*

"We can't be anyplace other than where we are right now."

A valued friend and former therapist, Edna Groves, said during one of our sessions, "Ed, sometimes you have to stand still and let it hurt. Sometimes you have to stand still and let it feel good, and sometimes you just have to stand still." I never wanted to stand still and feel the pain. I quickly did anything I could to make it go away. I didn't realize that feeling and then understanding the pain is an important part of my journey. Also, I didn't like to let my life feel good to me, because I never felt I deserved the blessings coming my way. This thought goes all the way back to growing up in my fundamentalist church where I was taught I didn't deserve the positive events in my life because I was a "sinner." Hearing that statement always brought the guilt and shame rushing back in to my soul. My lack of patience seldom allowed me to just stand still. When I finally turned my life over to God, which I didn't learn to do until late in my adult life, I wanted Him to respond on my timeline, not His. Life doesn't work that way for me. These days I'm trying my best to understand sometimes I have to experience the pain in order to know the joy that follows. I know I deserve to feel good, and I welcome those times. I'm trying to learn the importance of patience and listen to the messages and questions God sends me.

### Lesson 5, *The Crossroads*

This lesson, from my second book, closely follows on the heels of the lesson I just shared from *The Porch*.

"God planned my journey so I could find the path I've always been traveling."

Rediscovering the path to my authentic self is a journey I struggled with most of my adult life. Searching once again for my authentic path had everything to do with questions that launched my retreats. I struggled to once again find the inner peace that allowed me to let go and let God give me enough light to find my lost authentic path. Doing so was the only way I could rediscover that lost part of my soul. I carefully chose my words in the previous sentences. Since before I was born I have been on the authentic path God planned. Many times, for a lot of reasons, I lost sight of that path. The questions I took with me on my retreats to find my way back to that path were: On my journey toward wholeness how do I once again find my authentic self? How do I have that sense of inner peace God wants me to have? How do I gain the sense of inner control in my life God wishes for me? How do I, with God's help, get through each day? How do I allow my heart to be open to the messages and questions God is sending me? How do I discover those paths God wants me to travel?

These questions are powerful. Each day I ask God these same questions, knowing that each day He moves me closer and closer to the answers that interact with my life right now. Until four years ago I took no time to discover the questions and then live through them to find some answers. Each day I am getting closer to the

answers God wants for me right now. I do not know what answers he has in store for me on down the road. And that's a good thing.

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I hope this issue of *The Lesson Guy* has provided meaning to your journey. Please visit my website. at [www.thelessonguy.com](http://www.thelessonguy.com) to explore the many products and services available to you and your organization.

Sincerely,

Ed Poole

Lessons for Your Journey, Inc.