

PREFACE

It would be worthwhile for you, the reader, to understand a bit about me and to start with, you should know that I hold no ‘titles’. That means there are no professor titles, no religious, no theological, no college degrees, or any of that, including a “not so good” control of the English language or writing, just simple human etchings.

What matters is that I have a “life lessons degree” earned like everyone else, college degree or not, titles or not, – one day at a time. Like most of humanity, there have been many ups as well as downs – hills and valleys, bumps in the road, forks in the path and some wrong ones taken as well as many right ones in my life.

The past decade and half (16 years) I have been blessed with an enormous “challenge” that has taught me many lessons and put me on a spiritual quest greater than at any other time in my life. It is my desire to share a portion of this journey.

As a young lad (under age ten), I had a vivid imagination and a desire to “fix” and/or “build” things – to build a better “trap”. Building things such as – a go cart from scratch; taking a toy pump-up car (Christmas Gift) and remodeling so I could use the machine ran air hose in my father’s repair shop, to fill and not have to pump after each short run of the car; or make my own bow and arrows that were more than just toys, but could be used to actually hunt; or take a old broom handle and cut in small lengths and make darts using chicken feathers to make it go straight, and..... You get the idea, hundreds upon hundreds of ideas and dreams to turn into reality. But there were always limitations to what one could do. It is much like being in a confined space and not being able to break out. At least not yet, anyway, but we continue to dream.

My background was that of poor, hard working, good honest parents who built their own home from scratch. As well as the home, my father also built his own repair garage for his business, that of a mechanic, an all around “fix-it” occupation. He used left over, free to take, rail road ties to construct his “dream” garage and home. At age six, he recruited me as his helper because he could not afford to pay wages, and I worked for free (no choice). From six to age fourteen I learned much from my father, not only of vehicle and machine repairs, but farm equipment such as combines, hay mowers, tractors, caterpillars, to making his own tools. This background made it easy to build a go cart, remodel the toy pump-up car, fashion bow and arrows and so much more including completely remodeling my first home. Remodeling included carpentry, finish work, painting, stucco work, installing flooring, lighting, heat, bathroom – yes, everything.

At age fourteen I made my own arrangements to go to a Catholic Seminary some eight hundred miles away at Crosier Seminary in Onamia, MN. Since family had no money for this, I worked with the Bishop of the Diocese, and after being assured that I was serious, they paid for most of it leaving me with a smaller bill to pay in the future. After returning from a great year at this Seminary, I made the decision not to continue as my parents did not want me to go in the first place. This became understandable when I

learned that my parents had never traveled a greater distance than forty (40) miles in their life to that point, and that my father did indeed need me to help in his repair shop.

Instead of working in the garage again, which I heartily refused upon my return from Seminary, I was told to get a job and earn my way, and to help the family. This I did willingly not wanting to be a “grease monkey” mechanic any longer.

I worked for an Apiary that was starting up and helped grow it to over three thousand hives, each containing over forty thousand bees. Now that is a whole lot of bees with stingers that hurt us humans when they were upset with us interrupting their work and taking away their honey. During this time I learned many new things from a wonderful boss, including acquiring my pilot’s license at age 15. He was a ‘barn storming’ stunt pilot and he taught me well. Together we worked for the remainder of High School and one year of College. The small wages earned allowed me to buy an auto, car insurance, clothes, school stuff and help put food on the table. It was a pure joy the first Christmas when I could purchase items needed, and wanted, for each of my parents, and for my siblings. A good lesson in “it’s better to give than to receive”.

The Spiritual “quest”ions started early for me and, if you, like me, have issues of not being comfortable with 'one-size-fits-all' religion, those a bit anti-organized religion, and those who identify themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', then this book may just open the “boxes” that are holding God from us, or provide a new awareness of your own earthly journey.

We all have our own unique imagination, or thoughts, of what our God is like. Thoughts such as those we were trained with from day one, after birth, by well intentioned, well meaning adults who only wanted the best for us – taught from what they were taught by those who came before them, and from what they were taught, and so on down the line of ancestors.

We are but the sum total of our training and experiences, until we start on our own “Quest” for knowledge.

Afraid to question what both our parents taught us, and our religions’ taught us, (that was also instilled in us – just have ‘faith’) we continue to live our life, or the life style of someone else’s dreams or desires. Many of us never question any of these teachings, while some begin to question at first one thing, than another, until we are seeking God not confined by history. Questions – break that word down to Quest (part of the word ‘quest - ions’) that is, I believe, what we are here for – to quest for God, or to “seek” for God. There are many ways to quest, about as many as there are people.

Although people constantly hope to see a miracle that will give them the answers and direction they're searching for -- it hardly ever works that way. As Rabbi Brian said: The God of your understanding is not going to break character with your understanding of God --otherwise, the God of your understanding wouldn't be the God of your

understanding. So, if you don't believe that God would or could speak to you out of flaming shrubs or bushes, you probably won't experience that type of revelation...

No matter what the word God means to you, or what label you use for God, I believe each reader will find parts of this book interesting and challenging. This book may help you in discovering how to **Find Out What the God of your understanding wants From You.**

It is not the intention of this book to tell you what you ought to do or believe...but simply help you develop your own spiritual-religious voice so that you can -- to use the words of the Psalms --

"sing a new song to God."

Take courage. Do not fear. Start a new life tomorrow. Put the old mistakes away, and start anew. God allow us to start fresh so - be not burdened; be not anxious. If God's forgiveness were for the righteous only, and those who have no faults, where would be its need? (from God Calling)

A -- bit more....

About the Cover

A brief, wee, note about the cover design may answer the question of "why boxes?" "why a coffin?" "why the rat?" "why not a different cover?"

Why Not?

When thoughts first came to me that a lay person should write about letting God out of the box men keep Him in, I did not take it seriously. However, after too many nights of interrupted sleep with the same thoughts moving about the brain, I decided it was time to at least consider the possibilities.

Have you ever had such thoughts, and when you actually started to consider them, they propelled you forward? That is the case in this instance the thoughts kept propelling me forward. At first, making some notes of the nightly thoughts, and then actually contemplating the meaning, doing some little research and finally making notes on the computer.

Along with this process with wording, came flashes of a possible cover. It started with one box, closed, and another open, then it was 'propelled' forward to include boxes within a box, each with labels. Once the initial image was in rough draft, the 'coffin' idea popped in, as well as the small box labeled 'my box'.

"My Box" was small because in my past, along with the indoctrination force fed, my objective of God was pretty confined - thus it required only a small size box.

The 'coffin' with it's label 'Religions Box' came about later, then was tossed out, but it kept popping back in like a small child who persists in wanting attention. It seemed to represent the tightly sealed box that Religion's keep a "Living God" confined in, and unless one adheres to their thinking and rules, you are not allowed in. Thus it was that I decided to keep the coffin box and the thoughts that persisted.

The largest box is labeled "churches" because there are so many different ones in the world. However, it never seemed quite right because for me the word "church" means "people". Not a building, not a cathedral, not a magical glass building - simply people gathering to honor and worship God, the Supreme Being.

The biggest box that holds all of the others has a color red representing the blood that was shed by the religions demanding control and 'killing' the dissenters and opposition. History shows that there was much blood shed over the centuries, definitely not God's plan, but man's need for control and power. The Green color of one wall represents the riches of the Churches.

The rat represents me, chewing an opening to allow God out of the boxes. Rat also has other meanings given the creature by men. The world of gangsters would use the word 'rat' for those who betrayed them in some manner. In a way, I am that 'rat' for thinking beyond the confining boxes that hold God in.

There is really one other reason that friends believe I should include in the explanation. Here is the rest of the story:

A friend, PJ, called one day making a request. Her son and she were discussing Socrates and he asked a question, giving her an hour to think about it and he would call her back. She called me requesting my opinion and when I did not answer quickly enough, she said "well?" After giving it some thought, the answer and question would have been "circular" in my opinion, so I answered "who gives a rat's ass". She shared that with not only her son, but with other friends and soon enough my initials changed from J.H. to R.A. (PJ's husband, H.D., made the change, now all three of us have initials that do not represent our real names, but fit our personalities. All fun stuff.)

They have stuck, so much so that now on my e-mail signature I use a picture of a 'rat'.