

Oh to Breathe Again

“I long to cry to the God of my youth, but the God of my youth will not hear my cry.

I must change my God or change my cry.”

Large sheets of salt water crashed over the bow of the Blue Surveyor as we charged head long into the tumultuous sea. Twelve novice and anxious divers, myself included, shielded our faces from the stinging water while clinging to the side railing. Occasionally we tentatively waved to the similarly drenched occupants of our companion boat, the Firewalker. The dark and swirling skies bore witness that a typhoon had touched the tip of the island the night before, the remnants still threatening. This portentous scene was nothing like the four-color brochure that lured us to this tropical paradise.

After what seemed an eternity, we slowed down and circled. The captains of the two boats miraculously located the small white buoys bobbing in the giant swells. A crewmember snagged our line with a long pole and attached the cable to the boat. We had arrived at the site, the outer edge of Beja Reef on the southern tip of Fiji.

Our dive masters gave us last minute instructions while we quickly donned our gear. More than ready to get below the storm, we carefully timed the swells and jumped in two-by-two.

The waves tossed us like beach toys rendering our snorkels useless. Using our regulators to draw brief gasps of air, we slowly worked our way along the connecting rope to our companion boat. Here we found the mooring line that would lead us down to the coral head sixty-five feet below. After a brief equipment check, I gave the okay sign to my dive partner and we began our descent.

We pulled ourselves hand over hand down the cable into the depths while fighting the strong surge. As we reached twenty-five feet, then thirty, the surge seemed to subside.

At fifty feet we encountered a traffic jam, a panicked diver already heading back up the line. Contrary to the stern warnings from the dive masters, I decided to let go of the line and swim the last fifteen feet to the coral head. The moment I released my grip, the current swept me away.

Kicking frantically, I desperately grabbed for the line, but with my distorted depth perception the cable was much farther away than I thought. Just as I felt myself slipping over the edge of exhaustion and panic, I was finally able to grip the line. Heart pounding and barely able to catch my breath, we resumed our descent.

When we reached the coral head I was reluctant to let go of the line, but did. I was delighted to discover that in such a short distance the current had almost completely subsided.

We traveled almost due west along the coral reef for a hundred or so yards, descending another twenty feet to a sandy ocean floor. As promised, we found the horizontal rope that marked our destination.

Twenty-five feet beyond the rope, two large perforated aluminum trash cans hovered in the water, anchored to the ocean floor by ropes. Placed here the day before in anticipation of our dive, they had been leaching fish blood into the surrounding water. I anxiously watched as four dive masters took up positions as sentinels behind us, long pointed spears in hand. I turned to watch a fifth diver who was approaching the barrels when suddenly my field of vision was completely filled by a five-foot Grouper.

Again gaining composure in these surreal surroundings, I checked my air gauge. We had each started with 3,000 pounds of compressed air. Surprisingly, my gauge now read 1,100 pounds — nearly two-thirds gone. I quickly signaled one of the dive masters; he instructed me to be calm and stay where I was. I turned just in time to watch the fifth dive master empty the contents of the trashcans — bloody fish parts. I attempted to breathe shallow in an effort to conserve air but the anticipation of what was about to happen sabotaged the attempt.

Just a few months earlier I had purchased dive certification as a unique Mother's Day gift for my sweetheart, Ramona. Now we stood side-by-side, holding onto a thin rope, my air dissipating quickly, thousands of miles from home, ninety feet below the water's surface, a storm raging above us, intentionally diving with sharks.

Sensing the promise of good prey, these torpedo-shaped predators had been patiently waiting some seventy-five feet off, just outside the range of visibility. Now they began slipping silently into view. The first one in was a huge bull shark. It confidently and effortlessly glided through the water heading directly for the alluring meal. Unexpectedly it was not scary, but of course there wasn't any sound effects or ominous music.

Hardly able to take my eye off of this graceful creature, I quickly glanced again at my air gauge: 900 pounds and dropping fast. I felt a familiar surge of adrenaline. At this depth, even shallow breaths consumed a lot of compressed air and I wasn't breathing shallow. I again signaled one of the dive masters, more urgently this time, and he quickly motioned me to come with him. I alerted Ramona then turned my back to the sharks and followed.

Within moments I felt something nip at my fin. I instinctively jerked around to face my fate. There were sharks in area but no immanent threats other than my very vivid and active imagination, at least not yet. I turned back and hurried to catch up.

The dive master took us on a circuitous route around the coral reef while doing his best to avoid incoming sharks. As we crested the coral head, the mooring line was finally in sight. I stopped kicking, paused for a moment, looked behind me and exhaled a deep sigh of relief. I was going to make it. When I turned around to complete that last 70 feet between me and the mooring line I attempted to inhale. It became instantly clear that I was far from safe. In fact I had just crashed head on into the invisible brick wall every beginning diver fears most. I was out of air. My tank was empty.

I had been trained for this moment - in a swimming pool, but I was nearly seventy feet underwater and surrounded by feeding sharks. Instantly I could feel a tsunami of cortisol, adrenaline and fear dendrites crash over me. I was more than desperate.

I want you to inhale deeply through your mouth. Go ahead: pull in as much air as you possibly can, until your lungs are at their full capacity. Now hold your breath just for a moment as you presence yourself in your current life circumstances - relationships, career, state of your finances. Are you present? Can you see it? Can you feel it? Now slowly exhale through your mouth. When all the air has been exhaled, push with your diaphragm to force out any last vestiges of oxygen. Now - hold your breath as you read the next paragraph.

Do you feel as if you are drowning in debt, self-doubt, fear or confusion? Do you feel stuck in a dead-end job or struggling business? Are you paralyzed by an abusive relationship, lingering addiction or shame from a past mistake? Are you gasping for air, out of oxygen, out of money, out of faith, out of hope?

Do you feel it's unsolvable? Do you ever feel like it's too late, that all is lost? Do you feel like you are seventy-five feet under water, with a near empty tank, surrounded by flesh-eating sharks and slipping over the edge of exhaustion and panic? How hungry are you for a solution? How thirsty are you? How desperate are you? Are you willing to let go of fantasies and fairy tales and surrender to the real and sacred secrets of success? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to breathe again?

Now *breathe*.

As you have probably guessed, I was not eaten by sharks that day, nor did I drown. But I did come away from that ocean experience with a new appreciation for the power and poetry of breathing.

The moment I realized my oxygen tank was empty, I lunged forward kicking as hard as I could until I touched the dive master's fin. As he turned to look, I pantomimed

my crisis by slashing my open fingers quickly across my neck. In one instantaneous motion he swept his arm back, located his spare regulator and positioned it in my mouth. With my grateful heart nearly leaping out of my chest I welcomed a long drink of the fresh oxygen mix.

Oh, to breathe again.

We soon reached the mooring line and made our ascent, stopping just once along the way for a critical few minutes of decompression. Soon I was sitting safely on deck inhaling great gulps of delicious salt-tinged air being warmed by a sun that had finally broken through the clouds.

I have reflected on this defining moment many times since. I had received basic training and passed a simple test. Certified to dive, I jumped in. Early in the journey I encountered dangerous seas and wasted precious air just getting to the mooring line. On the way down I had violated a basic rule by letting go of the line prematurely believing I knew more than the dive masters. This mistake cost me critical volumes of compressed air. I was surprised how the current could change in only fifteen feet, such a small adjustment to create such different outcome. As a result of my arrogance, I had to abandon my sweetheart at the bottom of the ocean to focus on my needs and a rapidly developing crisis.

When I ran out of air, I was in real need. This was not a situation that could be resolved with sheer determination, raw will power, visualization, a clever aphorism or a motivational speech. I could not just gut this out. I was out of air and could not breath.

This was not the time to resent my circumstances. This was not a time to wallow in self-pity. This was not a time to take a stand and cling to my resistant and even rebellious nature. This moment required immediate and decisive action. There was not a second to waste. It also required assistance from my dive master who had valuable experience and air to spare. It required that I ask for guidance. It required that I do my best to stay level headed and surrender to the directions given. I did and it saved my life.

It was a vivid reminder of another defining moment in my life. We had lost millions of dollars in the real estate collapse in Southern California. We were facing the prospect of paying back a million dollars in personally guaranteed corporate loans and other personal debts accumulated while trying to save our business and lifestyle. We barely sold our dream home before the mortgage became delinquent but had to drop the price over 25%. The net proceeds were immediately consumed by creditors. The Mercedes and exotic sports cars were gone. The custom 40' bus was gone. The live in housekeeper and full time gardener were long gone. Years of gut wrenching work along with the fortune accumulated had evaporated into thin air.

With everything we owned loaded in two Ryder trucks, we packed up our seven children and relocated to another state. For the previous five years and only as an avocation, I had been writing and directing little films on social causes such as teenage drinking and driving, acquaintance rape, emotional, physical and sexual child abuse. It was time to convert this avocation into a career. What better place than the state where we did most of our postproduction work.

The sales from the films, mainly to schools and school districts, barely kept us alive. I tenaciously studied story structure and tirelessly wrote eight to ten hours a day, six days a week, all in an attempt to hone my skills. Then one day it happened. With the stroke of a pen, legislative changes dried up funding for purchases of our films. What little income we had ceased. It wasn't very long and the modest reserve created mostly by selling the last of personal treasures was gone. It was a living nightmare that every young father fears most and one from which we could not awaken.

I was a proud man with a proud heart. I was a hard worker. This was not fair! In the darkness of the darkest night, buried in debt, doubt and discouragement, every option that I knew thoroughly exhausted, my tank empty, completely out of air, I cried out in excruciating pain, "I long to cry to the God of my youth, but the God of my youth will not hear my cry. I must change my God or change my cry."

Sobbing uncontrollably from a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the answer came. However, much would be required. I would have to let go of my anger and resentment. I would have to let go of fear and self-pity. I would have to surrender my resistant and often rebellious nature. And hardest of all I would have to let go of my self-centric approach to wealth accumulation and agree to focus the balance of my life on bringing abundance to the lives of others. In short, I would have to radically change the way I was thinking. I would have to radically change my cry.

I wanted to breathe again. I agreed to the terms.

I immediately began applying everything being taught. Within a month, I received a phone call and the first door opened, an opportunity to write a script. I applied the principles and practices being taught to the script writing process. It worked and I was offered another opportunity. With the third one I was also given the opportunity to direct.

I was not the best writer or best director, but I knew a great secret and it was my “greatest weapon and none on whom I called could defend against its force.” Two hundred projects later, I wrote out the last \$14,000 check and mailed it to the bank. What a stark contrast from the dark nights when the light of hope had been extinguished and death would have been welcomed. The seemingly impossible was now an accomplished deed, a million dollars in debt paid back.

It is with reverence that I reflect on that evening when I spontaneously fell to my knees and expressed heart-felt thanks. I was asked only one question in that monumental moment made simple, “What lesson did you learn?” The answer rolling off my tongue then and echoes today as a constant reminder, “You open the doors of opportunity and I do the work.” The response in return from my now trusted partner was warm and reassuring, “Lesson learned.”

In the little, yet poignant book, *As a Man Thinketh*, James Allen writes, “Let a man radically alter his thoughts and he will be astonished at the rapid transformation in the material conditions of his life.” I stand as a witness that this to be true!

This book is the fulfillment of the promise I made on that darkest of dark nights many nights ago, “If you will show me how to get out of this dark pit and how to create worthy dreams in tangible reality, I will spend the rest of my life assisting others to do likewise.” Are you ready to breath again? Are you ready to do whatever it takes to learn and apply the principles and practices and become an Intentional Creator? Would you like to know how to create and live your dreams in tangible reality? If so, I have the experience and the air to spare.

Oh to breathe again!

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