

Life in the Afternoon - much more than a story of soaring - and reflections of that on my life.

by P.K.Odendaal. 23 October 2011.

Part 1 - Loneliness and Solitude.

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Part 2 - I must return

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Part 3 - I get a flying start

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Part 6 - Cry freedom.

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Part 7 - My Personal Testimony ... Freedom and Peace for ever.

I started this story off with the intention of writing it only in one or two parts, about a specific enjoyable soaring flight, but one thing led to another - as it usually does in life - and I am now find myself in Part 7, observing how the thought thermals of my mind developed around me. Yes, I was personally involved in this flight, but on reflection, it seems to me that I was also just an observer and an onlooker as this story developed and unfolded into much more than that.

I must confess that I have no free will, when I start to write, as it just flows out in a never ending stream. I can resist it, if I try hard enough, but I do not wish to upset the muse or exercise my free will unduly.

Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that I would end up with a Part 7, and that Part 7 onwards would be a personal testimony, but such are the thermals in life and in writing, that one does not know beforehand to which cloud a certain thermal may take you, and which thoughts would reign supreme in that thermal.

Thermals, like life and anything which happens to us, does not show us beforehand what their destinations are. A small thermal or whirlwind, which is a very small energetic thermal, develops at ground level and is influenced by various factors, of which the wind is the main one. The wind blows this thermal away from its source and it may only develop as a cloud many kilometres away. If one could see the cloud belonging to the endpoint of the thermal, one may decide beforehand not to take that one, if you do not like its cloud. And so in life, we do not know to which opportunity or trouble a specific act may lead. We follow it, sometimes blindly, and sometimes end up in very unfavourable situations. That is the magic, challenge and excitement of life.

Now that I think about it, it is not incidental or accidental that Part 7 takes this turn, as seven is the perfect number and a prime number, making it extra special for me.

In part, I must confess that I did not have the slightest idea that soaring would draw so many readers, comments and interest. Although soaring is one of my favourite pastimes, I think the mapping of life to that made a difference, as each one of us go through the same type of questions, experiences, joy and grief in our lives, and soaring is just so life-like, that it applies almost without seams and stitches, because on some more basic level it is all the same as life. Thus my story name, Life in the Afternoon, directly linking the ups and downs of soaring to the ups and downs of life. There is also always the possibility of Death in the Afternoon as well - so to speak.

Your continued interest has inspired me to take it to deeper and more profound and sublime levels, metaphors and meanings, as I went along. In the end, my own perspectives and evaluation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness gained tremendously by it, as I was in part talking to myself, the way I would normally do in the glider.

My personal testimony ... where do I begin and where do I end ... now that the whole seems so much larger than the sum of its parts; or is it vice versa? In a way, I feel quite strongly to talk more about my failures and disappointments, than about my victories, as I have learnt much more from them. As the saying goes - my disappointment is God's appointment - and so it was in my life.

I would classify my exploration of spirituality and religion like Henry Ford's adage about his success. He said that his success came from 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. In the beginning mine was 1% inspiration and 99% disappointments. However, today, because of this doubt, suffering or inexperience, I forgot which, I have grown to become accustomed to inspiration, and the disappointments have become exciting, knowing each time this occurs, God was ready to teach me a new lesson.

Scripture says that : Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

If He learned to be obedient by what he suffered, what better am I than He is? Thus I will try to include many of my own mishaps, shame and disgrace in this testimony.

When the Holy Spirit started to talk to me, many years ago, in tones of understanding, love and urgency, I was not sure where it would all lead to, but I knew that I was alone with the Holy Spirit and with God and I trusted them. In the Storm it was only me, the glider and the **storm**. I tried to keep the glider straight and upright, but I lost control now and then, and what is more, in the turbulence, I could no longer read the instruments. The vibration and turbulent movement caused them to blur, and I had to go on instinct and feeling, a notion that is so well developed within my senses in these circumstances, as a bird is comfortable with driving a car. One does not realise it, but in these circumstances one gets an orientation disability or sickness called Vertigo, and your senses become as reliable as the guest speaker at a Liar's Convention. You have no idea where up or down is, whether you are turning or flying straight.

Our spiritual lives start off the same way.

When the Holy Spirit came into my life, it was only me, **GOD** and the **storm** and **GOD** was BIGGER than the **storm**.

But I had Vertigo. I did not know what was right and what was wrong, not having discerned the fruit from the tree of Knowledge of Good and of Evil yet.

Although I like to write satirically about serious matters as well, I wish to keep this part seriously only, but I need to digress frequently into the realms of the superficial and mundane, to prevent tears from streaming down my cheeks as I relive the emotional and spiritual joy and pain which accompanied my introduction into, and even my growth in, the spiritual world.

So ... let me start at the beginning ... when I did not expect anything from life .. and when I was intent on becoming nothing ... having disappointed my father and brothers so much, by becoming an anti-farmer, and exchanging their mentorship for that of my God fearing grandmother. In the process also losing anything connected to a birth right. Maybe that was the beginning of my now pervasive distrust of Human Rights. As it turned out later - I have a Death Right, not a Birth Right.

On reflection now, mine was not a step taken in faith - it was an intellectual excursion or journey, under the mentorship of the Holy Spirit, in these latter years, but in the beginning it came naturally, not even by faith.

When I was about ten years old, I found myself in a strange situation, no doubt brought on by the things my grandmother taught me. When friends would visit my father, I would read from the Bible to their children, and otherwise entertain them for hours with the many stories I read in the Bible, or which my grandmother told me.

That was it. I did not do it by choice, or by coercion, or by inclination. I thought that that was how it was meant to be.

I can also remember how my sister and I would join my mother and grandmother during those evenings, singing gospel songs until the tears ran down our cheeks - now realising, on reflection, that it was due to the nearness and unction of the Holy Spirit. And that while my father was away on business or work. It was like Heaven indeed.

My grandmother introduced me to this very personal God for whom I was an important friend, and she told me the song 'What a friend we have in Jesus' - the most moving, concise and descriptive narrative of an intimate friendship and its essential elements ever written. Although this song moved my heart when we sang it, it was only decades later that I experienced the truth and depth of its content.

It was also decades later that I came back to the truth of what my grandmother told me, having gone through the rituals, laws, cosmetics, doubts, falsehoods and even abuse and persecution of Churches whose big shots spoke of an impersonal God. I had to go full circle, before I could realise and experience the simplicity of the gospel and of a personal God and of the truths my grandmother told me. Of course, the contribution by my mother was as significant, but she was very busy tending to us, whilst my grandmother had more leisure time to spend with us.

I still have a Bible, now being used by my wife, which my mother gave me when I went to high school, and it has the date 17 October 1959 written next to Rev. 3:20, the day I gave my heart to Jesus, when a person from the Bible Society visited our hostel in Stellenbosch.

From then on, it was mostly downhill (spiritually) for me. I got a taste of the world, of all things bad and evil, instead of bold and beautiful, acquired the usual bad friends and became one myself later, and this process, which took its toll over the next twenty years, left me way off the straight and narrow path, more than the 10% I hinted to in a previous part of this story - so much so that I was in danger of missing a continent - the everlasting one.

I was so intent on learning what the outside world had to offer when I left school, after spending more than seven years in hostel prison, that I told everyone that I was going out into the world and that I will be trying to experience everything without exception, to find out what life was about - and so I did. Fortunately I did not go into drugs which was not in vogue at that stage. I might not have escaped from that with impunity.

I must also relate the view of a university friend of mine, with the name of Jan 'Brode' - the latter meaning bread, but not being his correct surname. He studied Law and told me that the Bible was nothing but Jewish propaganda, and I, being the ignorant fool that I was for a big part of my life, believed him.

One of my friends, who was in the Reformed Church told me that in their Church you could do anything with impunity - even dance and drink - you are just not allowed to enjoy it.

I, on the other hand, was looking for a place where I could do everything I wanted AND enjoy it - that was Freedom. And if I could do it with impunity - that was Peace. I was coming closer to my goal which is summed up by the words of the gospel song : 'I want God's way to be my way, as I journey here below.'

I was thus very far from the truth and from God, when He found me one day in need of help.

Vain-glory.

As I write this testimony in the form of a story, I try to move away from centre stage, where I and my glider have been throughout this story so far, so that God and Jesus Christ can move onto centre stage, where They belong, but I find it impossible to do that, as it was I who experienced these things and I need to tell of my own impressions, experiences and thoughts. This of course opens the door for vainglory, a spiritual hazard we are all subject to, and which I wish to avoid at all costs. In fact, if this story is for my glorification, I will stop here and there will be no further story. However, many people before me have done such testimonies, only for the glory of God, and I just might also be successful. It was exactly those testimonies which motivated me or moved me to serve such a personal God in Spirit and in Truth.

And whilst I am busy with vainglory now, let me start off by warning myself, and perhaps you, of the dangers of this impostor.

The whole idea of being a Christian is that I should become less and God should become more in me. And then all goes well - until I see that things are going too well with me, as I have access to His unlimited power and resources. After a time, I get to think that it is really I who am that good, and I start to use this for my personal gain and even abuse it.

Do you think that this is not important and cannot be?

I can assure you that millions of Christians have died over the centuries because of just this. Church leaders who abused the privileges they received from God, were the instigators of programs such as the Spanish Inquisition and other similar persecutions of Christians. In the process, the Church, of course, got a very bad name which still clings to it up until today. In this I am reminded of a (learned) person who said that he will never drive a car in Paris. He just might see a priest with his black garb crossing a street, and he might not be able to resist the temptation of running over him.

In fact, during the persecution of the Cathars, Huegenots and during the Spanish Inquisition and the Reformation, more than two million Christians were killed, and even today, as I write, more than one billion Christians in various Churches are abused and prohibited from serving a personal God in a personal relationship. This is by being forced to obeying the Church and its rulers (sorry - officers ... or was that managers), in stead of God.

To move to a lighter mode, I cannot but bring in two witnesses to try and illustrate this on a more basic level.

Mac Davis wrote the beautiful song 'Oh, Lord, it's hard to be humble'. Of course, the song is not really his view, but he was placed in this euphoria of luxury, when he was booked into a very luxurious hotel room, which he thought he did not deserve, but nonetheless, it gave him this feeling that he was quite someone.

Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
when you're perfect in every way.
I can't wait to look in the mirror
cause I get better looking each day.
To know me is to love me

I must be a hell of a man.
Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
but I'm doing the best that I can.

It is the same type of accusation Christian had to face on his way to the Celestial City when he met Apollyon. (from *The Pilgrims Progress* by John Bunyan - a must read for every Christian)

Apollyon (the devil) : ... and when thou talkest of thy Journey, and of what thou hast heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vain-glory in all that thou sayest and doest.

How can one help but become that, when one has been in contact with the most High God? Still - it is a trap, and one should stay humble ... which is so hard to be - for an egoist par excellence, like me.

My Earlier Church Experiences.

When I was twenty-nine years old, a colleague of me, and friend then, asked me one day whether I knew that God worked today in the same way that he did in the New Testament, with signs and wonders and through prophets. I told him that, if that was so, I would be happy to join in and go to Church with him, but naturally I was very sceptical, as the Dutch Reformed Church, of which I was nominally a member of, did not believe in a personal God, much less in the working of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, by this time, I had again made a habit of going to Church, even though I was against going, egged on partly by the hypocrisy of the Elders and Deacons. I had nonetheless gone there now and then, due to my own 'hypocrisy' - that of satisfying the desire of a 'good' friend, or taking the children to Sunday School, or as a smoke screen to gather some points in our Church going society.

At high school, I used to go to the Presbyterian Church in Stellenbosch with my English hostel hog friends, mainly because there was a horticultural garden behind the Church, where we could smoke before and after services. In the process, I started to like the Reverend, finding out that he was actually a human being - a God fearing human being!!! - a person I could respect and like - contrary to my experience with the impersonal Dominees of the DRC, who preached formally of this impersonal God, who would whack me everytime I thought of any iniquity - and whom I could not talk to.

Every Sunday the Dominee would read these 'instructions from God' to us : 'God is in Heaven and you are on earth, therefore your words should be few.' What bad advice. Today I know that talking to God in abundance or profusion is the most satisfying activity or pastime - when you are glad, when you feel sad, when you are cross with Him, when you doubt Him, when you admire His creation, when you wish to praise Him, when you are in grief and pain - after all - that is what the song : 'What a friend we have in Jesus' says and means.

Of course, I was not allowed to attend the Presbyterian Church, as I was a Boer, and they were Englishmen, and the Second Boer War was still fresh in everybody's mind - we went through that history every year at school. We were warned against the 'Roomse Gevaar' (Catholic Danger) and the 'Rooi Gevaar' (British Imperialism). The 'Rooi Gevaar' would eventually peter out and make

way for a 'Swart Gevaar' (Black Danger) - because we always had to look out for any 'Gevaar' - from the Pope to the Present; all the while not realising that we were the 'Wit Gevaar' (White Danger). But, I was a rebel, and I went to that Church, even if it was only to tempt fate or our hostel warder - I forgot which.

Later, in the Air Force, a colleague of mine, a few years older than I, took me to the 'Grootte Kerk' in Cape Town every Sunday evening, after which we would go to the City Hall, where the Cape Town Symphonic Orchestra would perform some classical pieces. My exposure to the 'Grootte Kerk' was more pleasant architecturally than spiritually, and the symphonic orchestra was right up my alley.

Up to then, I have never been exposed to classical music - or any music at all for that matter - apart from the gospel songs I sang with my grandmother. The other type of popular music, transmitted from Radio Lourenzo Marques (LM Radio), I was not allowed to listen to - it was said to be directly from the devil. Now that I know what music from the devil really sounds like, I find those old songs as tame as Sunday School stuff by comparison.

Little did I know at that stage, that I had this insatiable love for music and I play five musical instruments today. Music to me, then, was painful; emotional and physical pain and grief in the form of my piano lessons. I had to suffer for six years from this plaque, before my father would budge, and let me off the hook for that - always interceded for by my mother - so I knew exactly what intercession was, when I learned about that later.

At the end of the evening, we would return to the Air Force Base in Milnerton by bus, sitting between drunken Capeys (as we used to call them) and losing all our newly acquired cultural, architectural and musical experiences of the evening.

When I completed my navigation course at the Air Force, I went back to Stellenbosch to attend university, and went back to the Presbyterian Church. Not that it was really such a spiritual outing, but I liked the Reverend. Nowadays, when I pass the Presbyterian Church in the city I now live in, I still think of my days in the Presbyterian Church in Stellenbosch. Unfortunately, the slogan on the Witbank Presbyterian Church has plagued me (or is it plagued me - pun not intended) for more than thirty years on my way to work, because it stands there in glass embroidered form for everyone passing there, to see who God really is : GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE ; and the embroidering contains such big flames, much like those of Hell - I can only guess.

When I married a Christian lady after graduating, I had to go to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) again - against my will, and as so often happens in that Church, if you are held in some esteem, mostly faking it, due to some learning or money, you get elected to the Offices of the Church quite quickly, and so I soon found myself to be the Chairman of the Deacons, being only twenty three years of age - in this congregation of the poorest of the poor. My job was mainly to extract money from the very, very poor members of that congregation in Doornfontein and Bertrams, in Johannesburg, and to see that the Dominee pass that money on to the Synod on an assessed affordability basis - a Synod who had more money than they could use. Most of the people I took money from, gave me their last few Rands, the last of their food money, but that was not my concern - I had to feed a bigger Giant - a Giant who saw it fit to invest the money of those poor people in Defence Obligations - to fund an inequitable and

unnecessary war. There was no intercession allowed here, however hard I tried to persuade our Dominee to have a heart and to resist the Synod.

If one pages through history, one finds numerous similar instances where the Church was willing, able and ready to fund wars against their adversaries, contrary to the Bible which teaches that they should love them.

My main embassment during my tenure as a deacon in this congregation, was when my first child had to be sprinkled with water at the age of three months, and I had to tell the Dominee why I wanted him to sprinkle her - a normal procedure in these situations. I did not know why the Church required that of me, and I wondered why he did not ask my daughter himself, but I dare not. In any case, I consulted my elder brother who was always of great help in such embarrassing situations, and he told me that it would suffice if I only told the Dominee that it was necessary because of a covenant God made with Abraham. I knew very little of God, much less of Abraham, and nothing of a covenant - I had no clue - but I was saved by the bell. It is quite embarrassing to answer these questions if, as a deacon, you are supposed to instruct other people in the fine print of this Church Dogma.

During that time you could only become a big shot in that Church if you became a 'Broederbonder', a sinister organisation like the Free Masons. I never had any inclination to join either of them. A friend of mine, whom one of these organisations tried to recruit as a member, told them that if one day he should lose all his self esteem, he would join them. I do not know why this Church wanted to favour this 'elect' organisation, when Christ was willing to take care of all nations :

Luk 10:34 And went to *him* , and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Rev 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

I will tell you later about my break with that Church in another part of this story. It was an event that was brewing for thirty years and had to come to a point.

Next time - Part 8 - The Search Begins.

