

CHAPTER THREE



My Story and Butterfly Moment

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” - Maya Angelou

The Message/Messenger

All of us have a story of some sort. It lays the foundation for “who we are” and “what we need to become.” It often points to the work we need to do on ourselves and also the work we need to do to serve the world. Like someone once said, “Take your messes and make it your message!”

By the end of this book, it is my hope that you will discover your own personal story. Without a doubt, it can be your greatest teacher and source of strength and inspiration.

As Maya Angelou says in the previous quote, failing to find and tell your own personal story can have grave and painful consequences.

Finding your story and healing its negative effect on your life could be the most important work you do in your lifetime. We cannot effectively help others until we finish the business of helping and healing ourselves.

“We all have a life story and a message that can inspire others to live a better life.”

- Brendon Burchard

Vacation Turned Nightmare

I came from a family of six kids, born and raised in the Detroit suburb of Roseville, Michigan. I experienced a wonderful 12 years of schooling from Roseville Sacred Heart. For all intents and purposes, I had incredible parents and great siblings. It was all a young boy could ask for. And then a dark cloud of tragedy struck from out of nowhere.

When I was 13 years old, while on vacation with my family in northern Michigan, my father experienced a massive and debilitating stroke, caused by a defective heart and carbon monoxide poisoning at his job.

For eleven years, this once healthy, robust man sat in a wheelchair, totally disabled and requiring 24/7 care from my mother.

I am sure that it was painful and frustrating for him to no longer be able to provide for his family, as he had done for almost thirty years. His eyes could barely focus and his speech was slurred and unintelligible. He was prone to fits of screaming and crying because of his complete frustration.

Prior to his stroke, my Dad was (for all intents and purposes) the perfect father. He was kind, hard working and loved by everyone who knew him. He

loved carpentry, hunting, fishing, Christmas and especially his family. In my mind, he was the ideal role model for a young boy growing up in the 60's.

He worked as a service manager at a Detroit car dealership. Hard work and service was what he was all about. Every Christmas he brought home arms full of gifts from customers.

Over the years, my dad used to talk about one of his “favorite customers.” He was a very rich and successful attorney in Detroit who always came to my father to get his Lincoln Continental serviced.

Dad always gave this lawyer top-of-the-line service, including working late to fix his car and personally dropping it off at his law office, so that he didn't even have to come and pick it up. This attorney always used to tell my dad, “Al, if you ever need *anything*, come to me. I'll take good care of you!”

To me, this looked like the perfect time to take him up on his offer. I urged my mother to consult this lawyer about Dad's legal rights. It was clear in my mind that his job (toxic car fumes) had caused his sickness and disability. There must be something that could be done. My poor mother was raising 6 kids with no income! Finally, my mom agreed to make an appointment.

Unfortunately, things didn't occur as I expected.
At the appointment, the lawyer suddenly

became a different man from the one my father had described. He was rude, abrupt and dismissive. After only five minutes, my dad’s “favorite customer” said, “Listen, Mrs. Schalter, I’m very sorry to hear about all of this; however, I am very busy. There is nothing I can do to help you.”

As my mother was leaving, the secretary stopped her and handed her a \$100 invoice for the attorney’s “services.” My mother told me she cried all the way home on the bus.

During those years, I wanted to help my parents, especially my father. However, I didn’t know what to do. I was making only \$5 a day as a caddie. I was angry at the legal system and disillusioned by the legal profession.

There weren’t many things my dad could do after his stroke, except one thing. He could still smile. And when he did smile, it lit up the room.

It was then that I had my own Butterfly Moment. I quit focusing on what I couldn’t do and started focusing on what I could do. This was my opportunity to leave the cocoon and fly!

Here is what I “could” do. I could do things that would make him proud, that would make him smile.

And so that became my goal. I was going to make my father smile. It was the gas that filled my motivational tank. Thanks to my Dad, my job as a

caddie turned a four-year scholarship to Michigan State as an Evans Scholar and a walk-on to Spartan Football team. I even promised him I would graduate from Notre Dame Law School.

The circumstances of my life did not change. My father was still disabled. However, my focus on what “I could do” was my butterfly moment of empowerment and quantum leap. It was this shift that made all the difference.

All of my sisters and brother made this same decision; each in their own way. And all of this brought great joy and healing to our parents.

This simple and yet miraculous choice completely changed my life for the good.

Exercise:

Write an answer to the following:

- 1) What is (or could be) “Your Story”?**
- 2) How did your story help create the circumstance of your current life?**
- 3) How can you use your story to help, inspire or serve others**