

David J. Terway, F-32909

David J. Terway
Professor Hereford

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Two Roads at the Same Time

Have you ever traveled on two roads at once? I have. Of course, as far as we know at this point in time, doing so is physically impossible. However, I did travel from the sprawling East Coast city of Virginia Beach, Virginia, with its family-friendly oceanfront resort area and its very transient military population (a large portion of which is Filipino, like my ex-wife), across the United States of America to Sacramento, California, situated in the valley between the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range to the east, and the Coast Ranges to the west. At the same time, I traveled on an immaterial road, one leading to the depths of my soul, as well as toward my Maker.

I made the physical journey over the course of five days, traveling an average of sixteen hours each day in a burnt-sienna colored 1984 Toyota Celica hatchback GT that was sixteen years old and well maintained by me. It was fully loaded, not with every option the manufacturer offered, but rather, with all of the personal belongings I could manage to cram into it.

I suppose I must admit that, in reality, the physical journey and the spiritual journey were so intertwined that they must be considered as one also, like the strands of the DNA double helix molecule, each side vitally important to the other, connected in so many intricate ways (see *The Double Helix*, Watson and Crick, 1968).

The genesis of this journey was the pain I caused my then-wife, Sheila, and our daughter, Cherish, over the previous eight years, from 1992-2000, as I shunned my responsibilities as a father and

as a husband, and placed the pursuit of my self-gratification foremost. I had sought meaning for my life, thinking I'd find the answer in the bottom of a bottle of charcoal-filtered Jack Daniels whiskey, or in the incredibly intense, yet short-lived, hold-on-for-dear-life rush of a crack-cocaine hit from a piece of glass tubing known to users as a "stem." I thought that the lack of inhibition brought on by the inhalation of the THC-laced smoke of some marijuana buds might provide an avenue to the answers I sought.

Sheila had had enough of my abusive, arrogant attitude, and the pawning of everything of value that I owned. I even traded her loving gift, given not for any particular occasion, but rather "just because" — a soft, supple, suede-leather bomber jacket with a satin lining, valued at over one hundred dollars— for a twenty-dollar hit of crack. She had had enough of my stealing money out of her purse while she slept, as well as enough of my waking her at two in the morning on a weeknight to go write checks for ten dollars over at three different supermarkets just so I could score one more thirty-dollar rock of crack.

She got into her 1996 Toyota Camry LE with our daughter and began her own journey to California one afternoon. For three months, I would be unaware that that is what she had done; I would not even know where my wife and daughter were for that quarter of a year.

After much talk and many promises and with Sheila's permission, I made the journey across this great country of ours, using Interstate 40, beginning shortly after Thanksgiving in 2000. A panorama of thought-provoking scenery passed before my eyes: many varied topologies and geographic regions, including mountains, plains, deserts, rivers, red-rock walls, and multi-colored gorges; winding, tree-lined roads and the will-they-ever-end blazing-sun drenched straight roads, sunsets and sunrises, lonely nights in cheap motels, and meals in towns where I felt the need to constantly watch my back all unfolded before me. All this presented itself in my solitude, with so much time to ponder where my choices had led. Most importantly, however, it caused me to remember and to turn to my upbringing in the Roman

Catholic Church, and the eight years of Catholic schooling that went with it. That is the immaterial road I spoke of earlier, one I had begun to travel in my youth but had inadvertently exited. In those days, I did not have my own driver's license, so to speak, therefore I let the church, God, and His representatives do the driving. However, at some point, I decided I could do my own driving, and I put the Faith in the back seat and I took the wheel. I felt "large and in charge," the master of my own destiny.

Not until my wife and daughter were gone did I realize that I had become horribly lost. I had traveled to a very dark place, one filled with seedy carnality, aching regret, dawns that took me by surprise, and diabolical disorientation. I tried so hard to kill the visceral pain and torment I was experiencing psychologically. Sheila told me that I needed to do a lot of "soul-searching"; I never knew what that term meant before this. What did I want out of life? Why do I exist? The answers, I realized, had been taught to me as a youngster, and were always right there in front of me. I only needed to trust in those who had taught them to me and in my heavenly Father. My own choices obviously were not working. I learned to pay close attention to both roads—the worldly and the spiritual. Just because I drive down a road does not mean I live on it, unless I choose to. It was very costly to ignore the connectedness of the roads. The physical and the spiritual are linked inextricably. For the time being, at least, the natural and supernatural coexist, not one without the other. Although one of them is more easily perceived than the other, it just might be that the less visible of the two is the one that ought to receive the greater attention. "Only the Spirit can teach us the logic of divine love, a logic based on self-giving and not self-preservation." (*the WORD among us* 34)

Works Cited

Meditations. *the WORD among us*. Feb. 2014:34. Print