EXAMPLE 2

Ten Year Vision

Where will I be in ten years? This is a question I often reflectively pose to myself. How can one simple question, containing just seven little words, be full of such endless possibilities and outcomes? Ten years ago, I would not have said that I would be a full time student, on my way to earning a degree in Sociology. Ten years ago I was still in my career of choice, truck driving. One could say I was just “spinning my wheels”, so to speak. A truck driver is certainly not something I had aspired to become when I got out of high school, but as we all know, life is a series of multiple choice questions with no right or wrong answer. Each answer edges us toward our next choice. In the end, we can worry about previous choices, or we can continue to look forward, make the best of things, and try to constantly improve. Occasionally, a perfect storm of events can culminate together and create new opportunities. This is what happened to me, but I must start at the beginning of this short saga; or at least, the beginning of how my vision of the next ten years was born.

Ten years ago I was a homeowner in Modesto, California, driving for a company called Viking Transportation. It had recently been purchased by FedEx and were in the process of changing their name to FedEx Freight. I was really happy about the fact that my drive to work was now only twenty-eight miles one way to Stockton every day, instead of the eighty miles I had been traveling to San Jose five days a week when I was a driver for a now defunct air freight forwarding company called Emery Worldwide, a company that had been in business longer than UPS. A combination of events had sealed the fate of Emery. They had a freight plane crash in Rancho Cordova, California in 2000, killing all four crew members onboard. One year later 9/11 occurred and all air traffic was grounded for over a week. Emery was poorly managed and approximately three years later, they shut their doors, forcing me to leave a job that I was positive I would retire from. This in turn led me to FedEx Freight in Stockton. For the first time in years, I actually enjoyed driving a truck again. In fact, I enjoyed it right up to the time in 2006 when I shattered my right wrist at work. I was off work for two years and had to have more than one surgery to have a plate, pins, screws, and anchors put into my forearm. While I was off with my injury, the economy took a serious nosedive, financially devastating countless people. Modesto and Stockton, both cities in the Central Valley, were two of the most affected cities in California by the financial disaster. It was terrible for me because I was already struggling to pay my mortgage and keep my lights on while I was on Workman’s Comp. I stayed in constant contact with my friends and supervisors the entire time I was off, and I could see that business was rapidly dropping. Everyone’s hours were being whittled down and the time was fast approaching for me to return to work. This was absolutely terrifying because I was toward the bottom of their seniority list. This meant that if there were layoffs, there was a possibility I could lose my job, which is very scary when you are single and live alone. I have gone through financial hardships while in a relationship as well, and I can tell you that I found it more difficult to go through alone. Two weeks after I returned to work, FedEx Freight laid off twenty people at the Stockton terminal. This was also done across the country and four weeks after the layoffs occurred, FedEx Freight got their new fleet of trucks that you see today, although they are no longer new. At this point, I was at a loss. My ex sister-in-law, Malia, was living in Modesto at the time, and she suggested that I move in with her if I was not able to keep my house. It was at this time that she also started to suggest that I go back to school. I had always wanted to finish school, but felt that I could not. I was still in the mindset that I was just a stupid truck driver, and that was all I was ever going to be. It was quite a depressing phase of my life.

I was in disbelief when I found a job at Estes Express two weeks later. Luckily, Estes was located right up the street from FedEx Freight, so I did not have to travel any further than I already was. There were so many drivers out of work in the Stockton area alone! Despite the fact that I found work so quickly, the damage had already been done to me financially. I tried to keep my house, but it had become such an uphill struggle that I decided to walk away from my house. Just like that. I simply packed up what I wanted to keep and left everything else. Immediately, I felt like a heavy weight had been lifted off my shoulders, and as fast as you can snap your fingers, I moved in with my sister-in-law. The economy continued on its downward spiral, and I was nearly laid off at Estes as well. All the drivers in Stockton were on cut hours. The drivers at our Oakland terminal however, were all on overtime because they were shorthanded. I immediately volunteered to transfer, since my past experience driving to San Jose every day was not bad. It was not long before I lived to regret the transfer. This terminal was the poorest run terminal I had ever worked at, which speaks volumes, considering I had been driving since 1993! The driver abuse that went on in that Oakland terminal was ridiculously irresponsible. No one had a set schedule, and I had to call in every morning to see what time I was to begin my shift. One day I would start at six o’clock in the morning, and the next I might start at three o’clock in the afternoon. I was endlessly exhausted all the time and incredibly unhappy. This went on for almost a year and a half before I had my epiphany.

My commute was pretty long, as one can imagine. Sometimes it would take me two and a half hours to get to work, so I used to listen to podcasts downloaded onto my iPod, or listen to books on compact disc. One of the podcasts I still love to listen to is a show called *Skeptoid*, hosted by Brian Dunning. I am a bit of a nerd, and I enjoy reading anything science-related, be it natural science, astrophysics, or political science. In *Skeptoid*, Brian Dunning likes to look at pop culture and urban legends with a skeptical eye and talk about them. I highly recommend Skeptoid to anyone who is interested in looking at the natural world with a critical eye. One day as I was commuting, I listened to a *Skeptoid* episode entitled, “*Decoding the Mormon Book of Abraham*” (2009). This changed my life forever, because I was raised in a strict Mormon household. I was certainly not a practicing Mormon, but I had always believed in God. This set me on a two year path to prove that God did indeed exist, and at the same time, I wanted to prove that the Mormon Church’s doctrine had at least a tiny shred of truth in it.

As I started to search for answers to my inquiries, I was astounded at what I began to learn about all the world’s religions and their histories. I learned that most of the male god figures used to be goddesses, because women were the “life givers”. I found this to be amazing as I gulped the information down like a dehydrated man in a dry desert, finding water for the first time. Eventually I came to the conclusion that many people do when they embark on a journey like this; that religions and all gods are nothing but mythology. I have come to the conclusion that mythology is simply a holdover from when we looked to the sky and saw our entire universe with our naked eyes. We had to find a way to adapt and survive, so we anthropomorphized the skies and the world around us, bringing the first concepts of what would become religion.

An interesting feeling started to grow inside me as I conducted my research, listened to many podcasts, and continued to commute to work. I began to get mad. I started to think about how much of my childhood was spent in absolute fear and self-loathing because of the crazy teachings I received as a child, and how religion indirectly tortured my father when he was a child. My parents fought all the time and they stayed together, all in the name of mythology. I thought about all the other people that had suffered as I had. Like the ripples in a pond after tossing a stone in, I started to think about the ripples in society caused by the stones of mythology and superstition. I began to think about other children around the world who are tortured physically and emotionally by a belief in mythology. I decided that, while no one person can change society, we all can contribute to its directional change in our own way. I want to help bring the introduction of rational thought to society.

Coming to the conclusion that religion is just mythology has been the most freeing experience of my life, because once I came to the conclusion that we only have this one life, I decided not to waste a second more of it. I sat down with Malia and talked to her about school, and we came up with a plan for me to make my re-entry into school a reality. I was still apprehensive about leaving a career I had worked so long and hard in, but at the same time, I was completely ready to walk away from it. I simply called my boss the next morning and told him that I was being given an opportunity to go back to school, and I was surprised that my supervisor was happy for me and truly supportive of my decision.

Once I tried to get into school, obstacle after obstacle continued to fall onto my path, and my life-saving ex-partner, who lives here in Oregon, made me an offer I could not refuse. She has allowed me to stay in her house while I attend school, rent-free. This will allow me to complete my education without having to worry about having a roof over my head! We worked out all the details and I left California to attend school in Oregon. I will eventually end up at Oregon State University, where I plan to graduate with a BA in Sociology after I complete my credits here at Linn Benton Community College. After achieving that goal, I have decided to continue my education and work toward a PhD. What I really would like to be a part of, is the creation of a new facet of the Sociology of Religion. However, I have no interest in teaching the history of religion throughout societies, or their importance across time within societies. Instead I am interested in researching the negative impacts of mythology upon societies and exposing their destructive power to rational thought, reason, and science. I have not been able to find a proper name for this field of study, but I want to create this field of study because we are in dire need of a freethinking, rational-minded citizenry. In ten years, I see myself preparing to graduate with a PhD so that I will be better prepared to throw the doors of opportunity open myself, if I must, and I welcome the challenge. Nothing good ever comes easy and in the end, if good things did come easy, then they would be taken for granted and missed.

Works Cited

Dunning, Brian. *“*Skeptoid.” *Decoding the Mormon Book of Abraham*. Podcast audio. 25

August 2009.