

**Short Excerpt from**

# **Challenging The Dragon**

## INTRODUCTION

By Dr. Anthony G. Payne

While teaching a class of university students in Japan during 2003, I drew upon the historic account of Gen. George Armstrong Custer's defeat on June 26, 1876 to illustrate an inescapable aspect of life:

"Friends, we are all headed to the *Little Big Horn*. Whether you get there as a young person or during middle-age or as a very old man or woman, ..we all have to the enter the valley and depart this world. No one escapes this fate. But as you correctly surmised, it isn't that final battle *alone* that determines the meaning and value of the life you have lived, but what you do in the days, weeks, and years leading up to it. And yes, the impact of your life and the ripples it sets in motion are determined by the choices and subsequent actions you take while en route to the valley."

<http://14ushop.com/wizard/quick-bytes.htm#anchor3>

Years later I would make the acquaintance of Jim Haverlock, a man who lives in the shadow of 2 valleys – one a literal valley (Methow Valley, Washington state) and the other a metaphorical one, but no less real (*The Valley of the Shadow of Death*). What he has managed to do and pull off while negotiating his way through the shadow lands of both is predicated on a rich blend of attitudes, practices and undertakings that are thought-provoking, awe-inspiring and heartwarming. His is a story that goes beyond one man's struggle with an insidious disease (Multiple Sclerosis); indeed, in Jim's life story are found keen lessons and insights that apply to each of us, for surely we all wrestle with our own individual demons and dragons, as well as a host of issues related to our vulnerabilities and mortality. I cannot but believe there is something in the pages that follow for everyone.

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

Victor Frankl, M.D.

## FOREWARD

By Ronald Foreman

Once in a while, not often you understand but just once in a great while, it has been my privilege to meet and get to know an exceptional person really well. This does not happen often since most of us, and I include myself, tend to suppress or at least hide our interest in another person for fear of rejection or ridicule. Speaking as one of the vast majority I have little fear of contradiction when I say that neither rejection nor ridicule are particularly helpful in encouraging friendship. But then, as I said, once in a great while someone comes along who triggers the thought: 'I would really like to know that man' and caution goes with the wind.

It's been some years now since I met Jim Haverlock who at that time was establishing a foothold in the real estate business in Washington State. Those who have read Jim's book: 'M.S., My Story' will know of the events that preceded and followed the diagnosis of his illness as ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and I will not attempt to discuss them here. It is sufficient to say that Jim took his many problems as a challenge that he needed to overcome and while he has had to acknowledge his illness he has never accepted it as incurable. From the beginning he felt that the three to five years given him by his physician was totally unacceptable and since at the time of this writing he is well into his Twelfth post diagnosis year—and heading for at least another twenty five - might be reasonable to assume that somebody had miscalculated. However, I prefer the alternative thought which is simply that Jim Haverlock can be an extremely resolute man who has decided to win this battle and he may well just do that.

Over the years he has developed a voluminous correspondence with fellow sufferers all over the world and many have marveled at his compassion and understanding, qualities that can only come in the world of MS when you can say: "Been there, done that."

Jim Haverlock is no saint, so very few of us are, but he is indeed an exceptional person who has never given me cause to regret my original thought: 'I would really like to know that man.' After all these years I am still working at it.

Ronald P. Foreman

## FREE FALL

A glimpse back...

“Ohhhh! No turning back now!”

“We were face down with our arms and legs spread-eagled. The tandem master opened a small chute to slow our fall to about one-hundred twenty-five miles per hour. The wind rushed at us, making the skin on my face move while the jump suit flapped in the wind. I held my breath in the first few seconds of the fall then relaxed. As we passed through a thin cloud, the cameraman filming our descent appeared in front of me and just a few feet below. There was sixty exhilarating seconds of free-fall before the chute opened. I felt the jolt as we went from flat fall to upright and slowed abruptly to thirty-five miles per hour.”

“My life, after all, has been a free fall. God had provided me with a joyful way to experience my faith. I was wholly willing to let go knowing I had a Merciful Savior. Then I did let go. It was fantastic!

Simply *f a n t a s t i c*!

It has been more than 6 years since those words were written as the ending of my first book, a book that opened up my life to the world. As scary as it was back then (and still is) to share one’s “diary of life”, I can honestly look back today and say: “It was worth every minute of the effort, resources and opening of this soul – to all those who would read the words expressed.”

Why? You may ask. And the answer:

Doors and hearts have opened, new friendships have been made, words of encouragement have been offered, prayers by fellow spirits fill the unbounded plane, things thought impossible have proven ‘possible’, and life continues to be rich, full and exciting; a journey whose path has afforded unending possibilities, joys and rewards, as well as trials, tribulations and sorrows. Living life one day at a time, like we all should do, and the great ‘sages’ admonished, makes this earthly journey a most joyous experience.

My life is much like an artist’s canvas bearing images, colors and hues that are a heady mix of vibrant and dark; a wondrous painting dotted with all the ups and downs that make this enterprise we call life worth having lived. I speak of seeing children grow into wonderful people with children of their own; meeting fellow travelers who walk similar paths to mine; witnessing the sun rise anew each day, and the sunsets that welcome the night; experiencing the joys and sorrows of family and friends;

Sorrows such as – loss of close friends as their season ends; shedding tears of compassion for those grieving their loss; shouldering the failures and hurts that family and friends go through; and dwelling at times in that valley which is filled with the daily tribulations we all witness and live. For in reality, life is all this and more, a mix of good and bad, joyous and sorrowful, burdens and carefree moments, love and it's loss, and certainly the occasional touch of mourning or grieving.

Experiencing life daily with an added “challenge” such as Multiple Sclerosis can be rewarding, although not without difficulties and the feeling of “loss” as what is ‘normal’ and taken for granted is compromised or lost. All those living with MS, or any other debilitating “challenge”, go through a continual ‘grieving’ process. ‘Grieving’ over each bodily faculty which does not work as well as it use to -- or not at all. It is a process that casts long shadows over each day and sometimes threatens to eclipse the sun.

How is this in any way, shape or form “Rewarding”?

It is...

And how so you ask?

Take my hand and join me now on this journey in the pages that follow, and discover thereby the possibilities that announce themselves to us all on a daily basis. Witness life through the eyes of one seeking a ‘healing’, a ‘miracle’, while learning what life truly is about; a quest for the meaning of life that for this writer includes the motive for hammering out this tome: Helping but not judging others, and loving all of creation. For as my friend, Dr. Anthony G. Payne so aptly expressed – “Our material possessions and honors are left at the foot of the grave. The only thing we take beyond the doors of ‘Forest Lawn’ is our deeds.”

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