

## Preface

It was my ego that stood one morning on the jagged rocks jutting into the Atlantic Ocean and prayed to the winds to let me work with the best, smartest people in the world. But it was God who answered my prayer and led me, head bowed, to a 28-day treatment program for addiction. I expected to land on a prestigious university campus, not in the remote hills of North Carolina. My books—even my journal—were checked at the door, and I began to experience the life-changing model developed by Liliane and Gilles Desjardins ([www.higherpower.info](http://www.higherpower.info)). I'm not an alcoholic or a drug addict. Oh all right, for a two-year period I was overly dependent on painkillers and sedatives, but I was free from those drugs, as well as the debilitating migraines that had driven me to take them. I was not, however, free from the disease of alcoholism that had ravaged my family for generations. The manifestation of disease in my own life was workaholism and codependence, so I ended up in a residential treatment program, "invited" to attend by my husband, who loved me enough to tell me that I needed help and here is where I could get it. As I experienced the Desjardins' unconditional love, I found, for the first time in my life, the power of simple acceptance, which I described like this:

"Rushing water is the only sound I hear, punctuated by the occasional call of the cardinal atop the tallest tree and the swish of light wind through the tall pines. My eyes follow the sound to the cantilevered boulders and terraced pools that guide the water's path through this place that bridges mountain and valley. Cool droplets glance my shins as I jockey, positioning my body for the best view. But there is no best view, precisely why I feel so safe in this place.

"Here, I know I will not be abused by someone's idea of what I need to do to be the best. My laurels don't matter. Neither do yours. No measuring. No comparing. No pertinent questions: 'Why don't you [do this]? Why can't you [do that]? Have you ever thought about...?' None of that. Just peace.

"No leapfrogging or catapulting here. Every rock has its unique place in the water's glide and fall. Every tree. Every fallen leaf and insect. Every patch of sky and wispy cloud.

"So I come here in silence, in reverence, and in the serenity that knows.

"I am accepted.

"Simply accepted."

To this point, my greatest handicap in life had been that I appeared attractive, smart, and strong. I looked as if I had it all together, so most people left me alone. But in this place, when I checked in, they discovered I had a hearing problem and had left my hearing aids at home because they needed cleaning. So, for the first class I was respectfully escorted to a seat with earphones wired to the ceiling. Someone gently placed them over my tired ears. What relief! I was so grateful I almost cried. Listening was easy. For the first time, I didn't have to strain to read the teacher's lips.

A few years later, an audiologist explained to me that the type of hearing loss I had, which she called a "cookie," was hereditary. I was born with it! The line graph she showed me revealed a normal pattern until the lines suddenly dropped, as if someone had taken a bite out of a cookie. For the first time, I understood why I read lips so well; why I am such an intent, focused listener; why I always sat near the front in my classes; why my parents used to say, "Do you hear me!?" when I didn't immediately obey.

As I yielded to the imperfection of a hearing impairment, I relaxed. Completely relaxed. Maybe for the first time in my life.

Growing up, what I had learned about love was very confusing. I had taken refuge in school and church. But even in these places I learned that to get approval I had to meet someone else's expectations, which I now realize was *conditional* love. (i.e. you meet my conditions, and I give you love.) In effect, I made those people and their beliefs my gods.

But in this beautiful, remote place, for 28 days, I lived in an environment in which no one was a favorite. It seemed that everyone was getting what he or she needed. For the first time in my life, the alcoholics were not getting more attention than I was. There was no one I needed to please. It was an amazing difference from what I had experienced out there in the real world. Yet, this new world was also real. I learned that if I didn't follow the rules, I would be corrected gently, with respect. But I *would* be corrected. I would not be overlooked.

Here, all my books, even my journal, were taken from me and locked up. For 28 days, I was not to exercise my mental faculties. Instead, I was to open more of my emotional and spiritual being. Long hikes were encouraged, and beautiful trails made them enjoyable.

I learned how dependent I had become on books. Some people might even call it an addiction. In a sense, books had also been my gods. If I had a problem, I went to the bookstore or library—not to the chapel to pray. But here I could learn simply by sitting and being quiet. I learned that I didn't have all the answers for other people, even when I thought I did. I learned that I suffer from the "halo effect", the notion that I have to be better than everyone else, making a god of my own image of myself. I learned

that all addictions grow from four roots: control, security, suffering, and sensation. I learned about “process addictions,” like addiction to work, exercise, relationships, Internet—even books! I experienced the miracle of witnessing someone (my roommate) finding God for the first time.

Based on watching what areas of the brain activate when stimulated by spiritual language and images, neuroscientists have identified what some call the “God spot.” It’s in the right hemisphere, the same part of the brain that wordlessly appreciates art and creation. As one of my clients put it, “Once that God spot lights up, then I can see the tiny lights along the trail leading me forward.” Some say we are “hard-wired” for a relationship with God. Frankly, I don’t care about scientific or religious debate that attempts to establish what God is, where God is, who is going to heaven, or who is right. What I care about is living my life as fully as possible. Within me is the capacity, if fleetingly, to leave my ego and be one with God. Those are moments of grace. When they occur, I am at my best. People come. They want me to teach them. As I teach them, I learn and my life continuously improves. This book contains many of their stories. The names I’ve used are fictitious, to preserve anonymity. As I live out my life, I want to spend more and more moments in a state of grace. That is all.

## Touch Me, Too

The sunrise hour  
I spend with me.

Waft of newborn air,  
Constancy of trees,  
And fresh bird calls—

From a distance.

Gradually the light of day  
Enfolds the slumberous hill  
And gentles it to  
Awakening.

Then it comes alive—  
Moves.

I rise from my  
White, warm piles,  
Walk boldly to the edge,  
And say to the sun,

“Touch me, too.”