



secrets

a true story of addiction,
infidelity, and second chances

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The Secret

I wish it never happened.

I remember the day very well. It was 1986 and I was twelve years old. A friend and I were playing in the woods behind his house. It was a hot, steamy summer day. We were pretending to be *Rambo*, saving captive villagers and waxing the enemy. It felt like boyhood innocence at its best. Then it happened.

“Hey, Jonathan, are you thirsty?”

“You bet I am.”

We headed off through the woods, back toward my friend’s house. We swung our play rifles by our sides, kicking rocks along the way, heading from one point to another in a zigzag manner as adolescent boys are prone to do. My friend was walking a few paces in front of me when he suddenly stopped, turned around, and with an expression on his face like he just calculated the square root of pi, said, “Oh, I just remembered something I wanted to show you.”

At that, we changed direction and began marching out into an open field covered with tall alfalfa grass. I still remember the musty smell of that grass, so thick I felt as if I could choke on it in the air. The grass coarsely slapped at our jeans as we waded our way out into the field. I remember how hot it was as we walked out from under the cover of the trees. I felt the sun beat down on my neck and sizzle the beads of sweat as they formed there.

As soon as we entered the field, my friend picked up the pace of his walking. I, however, maintained my slower pace, content to take my time, not thinking there should be any hurry to what we were going to do—whatever that might be.

As my friend went on ahead I could see that he was walking toward a tree stump in the middle of the field. My innocent mind began to imagine what “treasures” that stump might hold. Maybe it contained the carcass of a raccoon or wild dog. Or maybe there was some hidden jewelry or other loot left by gypsies. (Sure, gypsies in central Texas. Who knew? This is the way my twelve-year-old mind worked.) Nonetheless, I

simply kept walking where my friend was leading.

My friend reached the tree stump first and turned to make sure I was still following. He waited eagerly for me at the stump, and as I got closer I noticed a wry smile stretch across his face. I thought nothing of it, but when I reached him I did get more excited as I anticipated the unveiling of the hidden treasure that lie beneath the stump.

“Are you ready?”

“Sure, I guess. Ready for what?” I said.

“Ready for this?”

My friend reached his hand down into the tree stump, feeling around for something. All I could hear was what sounded like dry leaves crackling. Then, triumphantly, he lifted his hand out of the stump, grasping what looked like a tube of glossy paper. I couldn't quite make out what it was. It appeared like it might be a magazine or binder of some sort. He turned toward me, stretched out the cylinder, and opened what he held.

There have been moments in my life that have attempted to

define me as a person, either positively or negatively. I couldn't always see these moments coming. They just seemed to 'appear' without warning. And when such a moment arrived, if I was unprepared to deal with it, I simply got swallowed by it. And, thus, the moment changed me, or at the very least changed my direction. In the case of what I encountered in that open field, my direction was certainly going to be changed.

I am sure my friend had no idea that what he was doing would impact my life the way it eventually did. He never could have imagined in that instant how this seemingly ignorable moment in history would obsessively drive my life for the following 13 years. Moments do matter. And some matter more than others. This moment crippled me in ways I couldn't realize at the time.

In order to understand the magnitude of this moment, I need to share an incident from earlier in my life. I was six years old. My family was visiting my mom's parents. I loved my Granny's house. It always smelled good, like something sweet was around every corner (except the bathrooms, where it always

smelled like old people).

One day I was playing in the corner of the living room while my parents and grandparents were talking. I don't remember what toys I was playing with, but I remember becoming interested in the grownup conversation on the other side of the room.

“Heaven.”

“Hell.”

“Sin.”

“Jesus.”

These were the words I heard as they talked. Periodically, I would toss a question their way, not so they would direct their attention toward me, but so I could understand this story they were telling. What they said sounded so real, so attractive. They spoke of all the bad things people did, and called this sin. They talked about God loving us, his precious creation. They shared how God's heart broke because of our sin, but that he had a plan to fix it. The plan was Jesus paying the penalty we deserved for our sin by dying on a cross and coming back to life. Then they

explained how anyone who believed in Jesus would live forever in heaven. I wanted in!

Without drawing attention to myself, I slipped out of the living room and hurried down the hallway. I darted into the bathroom and locked the door behind me. My heart was beating fast, I was nervous about talking to God. But I wanted to go to heaven. I wanted all my wrongs to be covered. I walked over to the toilet and knelt down. With my left arm draped over the toilet seat and my head bowed just below the rim, I prayed.

“God, this is Jonathan. I know I do bad things that you don’t like. I heard my parents talking about the plan you made to fix my bad stuff. I don’t want to go to hell for being bad. I believe Jesus died for all the bad I’ve done. Will you save me?”

Nothing happened. My heartbeat did slow down a bit, but I didn’t see angels or hear voices. The only sound was coming from water slowly dripping in the toilet. I then realized where I was, the smell of old people jolting me back into the moment. I unlocked the door, walked back down the hallway to the living room, and continued playing in the corner. I had no idea of the

significance of my seemingly inconsequential moment in the bathroom. I didn't realize I had just become the newest citizen of heaven.

For several weeks after my bathroom conversion, I prayed every night for Jesus to save me. I kept thinking that I was doing something wrong. I just knew I was supposed to *feel* something. But each time I prayed, I didn't experience anything out of the ordinary. I eventually told my parents what I had done and they were very excited for me, smiles from ear to ear. This helped me feel better. After all, I didn't figure they would be that excited if I had "done it wrong."

If there was anything I did notice change, it was my awareness of right and wrong. It seemed I became more sensitive in recognizing when something was wrong, like there was an internal nudge or twinge when something in life wasn't lining up quite right. While I didn't recognize it immediately, or even know that it had anything to do with what happened in my Granny's bathroom, it was there.

And it was this change that caused the moment with my

friend in that field as a 12-year-old kid to leave such an indelible mark on my life.

Pornography.

That is what my friend pulled from the tree stump and so gleefully presented to me.

“Pretty cool, huh?” my friend beamed.

I thought my heart stopped when he cracked open those pages. The image printed on that first page I saw was immediately seared into my brain. It is still locked away in the dark recesses of my mind, and could probably be recalled if I chose to pull it up again. I had never seen anything like it, and it caused some very strange reactions in me.

Immediately upon seeing the porn I felt the urge to look over my shoulder, as if I knew I was getting away with something. Guilt seemed to spring to life in me and push me toward a “run for the hills” response. But I didn’t run. I stared. I wanted to look, even as the guilt pounded at my mind. I felt a rush course through my body that felt amazing, exciting, and

arousing (even though I didn't know what that meant at the time). What my body was feeling quickly overpowered any sense of guilt I had, and I craved to see more.

“Yeah, pretty cool,” was all I could utter in response to my friend's question.

We thumbed through the magazine for another few minutes, trying to make out images on some pages that had been rained on. I tried to play it cool, responding to the pictures by taking cues from my friend since this was all new territory for me. But what I really wanted to do was shout *Holy cow! This is the wildest feeling I have ever had! My head is spinning, and I'm teetering on the line between vomiting and ecstasy, but this is amazing. How can I reproduce this rush tomorrow and the next day?* Instead, I coolly nodded my head, giggled when my friend did, and focused on keeping my jaw from dropping too closely to the ground.

Eventually, my friend rolled up the magazine and stuffed it back down inside the tree stump for some other neighborhood kids to find. We then began to walk away from the stump,

through the field, heading in the direction of his house for something to drink. But I wasn't the same. Something had changed. As we marched off that field, I was oblivious to the grass brushing against my jeans or the sun scorching my neck. Instead, my mind was spinning with the naked images I had just seen. In that moment, innocence had been lost. A door to another place had been opened and I had walked through it. I possessed something I did not have before: a secret. And it was a big one.

I wish it never happened.

Living in the Light

What have you experienced in your life that you regret? Is there something that remains hidden, something that happened that frightened you or hurt you? Is there anything that you have gone through in your life where you say today, "I wish it never happened?"

The fundamental first step to living life "in the light" is to acknowledge and confess those things that remain in the dark. I invite you to spend some time conducting a "historical

inventory” of your life, maybe even journaling some of your secrets and the experiences you faced. Then, in the presence of a trusted friend, family member, counselor, or clergyman, share your story.

You don't have to share it all at once, but the journey to a life of no more regrets starts by bringing to light what has been in the dark. You can do this!