

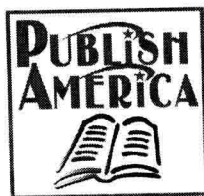
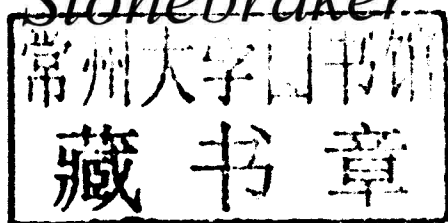


WRESTLING WITH REASONS

Stephen Stonebraker

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PublishAmerica
Baltimore

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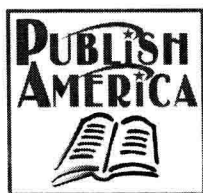
Baltimore

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CHAPTER I

I suppose my entire life I was searching for answers. Ever since I was little, I always believed there was some sort of reason behind everything that ever happened. As I got older, I began to accept the fact that whatever those reasons were, they were never going to be revealed to me. Yet, there was one incident in my life that no matter how much I tried to stop caring, it still bugged me. No matter how much I tried not to think about it, it was something that entered my thoughts every single day.

When I was in high school, I was on the wrestling team. My Dad always advised me to be a simple man and not ask for much. So, at a very young age, I decided the only thing I'd ever ask out of life was to be a good wrestler. It'd be the only thing out of life that I'd ever truly want. While other people wanted it all: the career, the girl, the kids, the car, even the perfect dog, all I asked was to wrestle and place at the Iowa High School State Wrestling Championship.

I worked hard and I was dedicated. Man, was I dedicated. While other kids were out with their buddies getting drunk or with a pretty girl trying to get laid, I was usually in the weight room pumping iron or in the wrestling room working on moves. I didn't lack any passion, nor did I lack a work ethic. What I did lack was many things though. More than anything I lacked, was having this opportunity come at the right time in my life. My high school years were a very

STEPHEN STONEBRAKER

tough time for me. When I was a sophomore in high school, my mother died and my father became very bitter about it. After having a somewhat promising freshman campaign of a 15-18 record, my career began to founder like the Titanic. It had struck an iceberg and no matter how great of a length I went to in order to save it, it was destined to perish.

I was 18 years old the day I got beat out of the district-wrestling tournament. A freshman from Iowa City West, our rival, beat me 3-2 tiebreaker in the true second place match to qualify for the state championship. The freshman was ranked fifth in the state and I had taken a third place finish after only being seeded sixth. My coach was proud of me and told me to keep my head held high as my third place finish helped us to bring home a 3A district team title, but I couldn't have been more disappointed.

I smiled in the team picture. I smiled on the award stand with my bronze medal. I smiled when I shook the freshman's hand from West as I hugged him after our match and told him that I hoped he medaled at the state tournament. I even smiled when the referee pulled me aside and told me that he'd been watching me for a long time ever since I was little and was really hoping to see me succeed. You know, it's so ironic. It was one of the worst days of my life, yet I think I smiled more on that day than I ever had before or since.

A lot of people never understood why I got so upset over not going to state in wrestling. They would say things like, "Dude, I wanted to go to state too, but I don't let it bother me that bad". Others often thought that because it meant so much to me to succeed in wrestling that I must have lived a pretty spoiled life, with no real tragedy. That was just the opposite really.

Wrestling meant so much to me. After my mother died, when I was 15, it was the only thing that kept me from trying to join her for such a long time. Really, the only reason I even got up in the morning to go to school was that I had promised my dying mother in her hospital bed that I would win her a medal from the high

school state wrestling tournament.

The years went on and I was no longer an 18 year old kid, sitting in a cold locker room alone balling my eyes out, questioning why I had been denied something I had wanted so badly and worked so hard for. Instead, for the first five years, until I was 23, I became a very depressed and bitter individual. I ended up going to college and found myself avoiding people because they were happy and I wasn't. I didn't want to be around them. Most nights I spent locking myself in my dorm room and only going out very late at night to get something to eat, or taking a shower when I knew there wasn't going to be anyone else around. I was never mean to anyone during that time in my life, but I sure did give off a vibe that I wanted to be left alone. I suppose the picture I'm painting of myself, sounds as if I never interacted with anyone. Truth is, I did interact with people, but I often wanted more out of them than they could give. I wanted them to give me answers. I wanted them to comfort me, to listen to me, to be able to do what I knew they'd never be able to do....make it all better.

I began to believe in my life that I'd never get over not placing at state. I thought that it would bug the hell out of me until I finally died. Then shortly before my 24th birthday, I met Jody Dennis. You know, sometimes in life people try and work on you to get you to see something for a long period of time. They spend years and years trying to get you to see your life from a different perspective, but despite their greatest effort, you never do. Then another person you've only known for a short period of time can say almost the exact same thing in a 15-minute conversation and the light inside your head finally clicks on, and you get it. Jody simply said to me, after listening to my same spiel that had become so tiring and redundant, that maybe the reason I didn't place at state was because IF had I placed, I would have been satisfied with that. Maybe I would have continued on the rest of my life never having another goal or never desiring another achievement. I just would have

simply lived out the rest of my life and then died.

For a while, that answer brought my spirit up and my smiles became subconscious reactions to actually being happy, rather than forced, like they had been for so long. I thought to myself that obviously I didn't place at state, because I was supposed to do something else important in my life. I didn't place at state, because not placing was going to give me the drive and motivation to do something much greater and much more spectacular than a medal ever could.

That was fine for about 15 years, but I was very unhappy with my life. I did my best to convince myself to be happy, but I wasn't. I had a few good friends and I had a decent job. Nothing I could complain about too much, but I had begun to become bitter about high school wrestling again. I began to realize that what Jody had said to me he meant, with all of his heart. Yet, in reality, it was nothing more than a feel-good bullshit line to make me try and stop feeling as bad as I did.

I was near forty years old; I had done nothing significant in my life. I wasn't married. I had no children. My dad had passed away about ten years before and other than a few coworkers, that'd miss me at least for a while, I really had nothing left to live for.

I got into my 1988 black and silver Chevy Blazer that I had bought from my Uncle Leroy when I was 30, after my dad died, and headed out to the Manhattan Bridge. Not the one near New York, but a little bridge that went over a small river out in the country. When I was little, my dad and I went on a lot of rides and it was one of my favorite places. After my mom died, it was often a place I'd go out and sit to think about things.

As the speed limit sign read 55 mph, I realized I was only going about 30. It was as if at that particular time I was the only person in existence. In this entire world there was not one single other person except for me. As I drove, I began to collect my thoughts that I had been hiding from for almost 20 years. I fought back tears, as I had

WRESTLING WITH REASONS

to reassure myself that there never had been a reason behind why I hadn't placed. In fact, had I took home a medal from the high school state championships, my life would probably have turned out better, a lot better. I would have wrestled in college and done a lot better academically. I would have gotten a job that actually had something to do with my degree and I would have been somewhat normal and married with children. The more I thought about how unfair life had been to me, the less I thought about turning around.

I was scared. Jumping off that bridge onto the sharp rocks below might hurt and it wasn't a guarantee that the 50-foot drop would kill me. Yet, with the cold water running below and the temperature about 57 degrees outside on this cool September day, I was sure that if nothing else, hypothermia would kick in and that would eventually get me. To be 100% honest, the idea of a painful death didn't scare me as much as living out the rest of my life knowing I never did anything and wasn't anybody. As a matter of fact, in sort of a sick morbid way, that only those who have felt what I felt could possibly understand, I actually looked forward to the pain. It'd be nice for once to physically feel as much pain as I had mentally and emotionally for all those years.

A part of me tried to tell myself that I was being a coward and being selfish as I parked the Blazer, got out and began to climb over the railing of the bridge. As I stood on the side I began to think of how I had thought about doing this ever since I was 18 but didn't because of so many different reasons. Yet now, as a 40-year-old man, I just didn't care anymore. I was tired of hurting so much. I was sick of lying to myself everyday, saying how things would get better. Even worse, I was sick of actually believing it. I was sick of truly feeling in my heart that with perseverance, faith and a little hope, one-day things would turn around and I'd get my break. I suppose what kept me from this moment when I was younger was that no matter how hard it was for me to accept, I could always be okay with saying, "Someday". Tomorrow was something I could

live with, but ‘never’... wasn’t.

I stood on the edge, gripped the bridge with my hands and then leaned forward. I figured I’d be terrified but instead felt the most relaxed I think I had ever felt. I then let go and began to fall forward. In what couldn’t have been more than 1/30th of a second, I felt as if I had frozen in midair for what could have been a lifetime. Memories of my life began to flash before my eyes. I kept waiting to hear a loud smack and then either be dead or feel an awful gush of pain. Instead, I felt two arms grab me from behind, pull me up and over the bridge and break my fall as we landed back onto the pavement.

I opened my eyes to see an older, but still well built Indian man with long gray hair. I looked at him and then he looked back at me. I didn’t know what to say because I was at a crossroads of emotions. The selfish part of me wanted to ask him why he had done that. The selfish part of me wanted to chew him apart and go off on him for keeping me from doing what I felt I had to do. Yet another part of me had always longed for altruistic individuals and even though I had wanted to end my life, felt extraordinarily appreciative towards this man’s empathy.

I didn’t know what else to do, so I looked at him and said, “Thank you”. He just looked back at me. I stood up and reached down to help him up. He took my hand, never breaking eye contact with me. I smiled at him and patted him on the shoulder. I couldn’t be mad at him. He had only done what he felt in his heart was the right thing to do. I couldn’t hardly believe the way the man was dressed. He wasn’t in traditional Indian gear but he wasn’t exactly dressed in modern day 2020 clothes either. He looked like something out of the late 1800’s early 1900’s.

I looked around for a vehicle of his wondering how the hell he had gotten out to me, or where he had come from. I looked down below to where I had parked my Blazer, to see if maybe his car was down there. Not only was there no vehicle of his, but also my

WRESTLING WITH REASONS

Blazer wasn't down there either. Had I been that focused on myself that I didn't notice my Blazer being taken and another person being close enough to save me from killing myself?

I looked back at the Indian whose eyes had yet to leave me. I wasn't sure what to do next so I looked at him and said, "I think we're gonna have to walk back to town". He merely pointed. I turned around to see a red Jeep that resembled a Wrangler, but with modifications that I had never seen before, making its way from a far off distance about a mile or two away towards us. I looked back at him.

"Good, maybe they'll give us a ride", I said as I smiled.

He smiled back at me, which made me feel good. I thought to myself that maybe this guy didn't understand English, but I thought he could at least understand that I was thankful for what he did for me. He couldn't have possibly known that I had been prolonging this event for 20 years. He couldn't have known that I had already talked myself out of it 1,000 times. He couldn't have known that I tried to come up with any possible excuse not to have to come to this conclusion. He couldn't have known the endless nights I spent trying to come up with a reason, a purpose, as to why I was still here. No, he couldn't have known any of that. So, the only thing I really had to go on was his motive, and that was to save my life.

As the Jeep approached us and began to slow down, I looked back at the Indian and said to him, "We're in luck. He stopped".

"There is a reason," he said, as the Jeep came to a halt.

What the Indian said sort of startled me. Did I really hear him right? Did he say, "There is a reason" as in the thing I had searched for, for such a long time? I had to ask him again, but I also realized that the man in the Jeep wasn't going to wait for me to question the Indian, so I went up to the jeep as the passenger side window began to roll down.

"What in Sam's Hill you doing out here all alone at this hour

kid?" The man in the Jeep couldn't have been more than 30 years old, so I sort of laughed at the thought of him calling me kid.

"Long story", I said with a smile, "You see me and my friend here..." I looked back to have the Indian step forward but when I looked back he was gone. I looked around from side to side wondering where he could have gone.

"You say you got a friend out here with you?" the man had a concerned look on his face.

Not exactly sure what to say, I looked back at him and said, "No, my friend left me out here. We were taking a ride and he got mad and left me here"

"Well, that's no friend!", the man in the Jeep reached over and opened up the door, "Hop in kid"

I got into the Jeep, sat in the seat and buckled my seatbelt. "Why do you keep calling me kid?" I asked the man.

"Cause you are a kid," he said as he handed me a handkerchief, "Here wipe some of that dust off your face. There's a mirror attached to the visor."

I was about to tell the man that I was probably ten years older than he was, as I pulled down the mirror to see my reflection. I jerked in fear as I saw the reflection looking back at me. It's not everyday you look into the mirror and see a stranger, but that's what I saw. I saw a young man probably fourteen to sixteen years old, who looked young and full of life. I kept thinking that I had seen this person before, but couldn't quite picture who he was. All I knew was that although I didn't know who exactly I was on the outside, I was still me on the inside.

"Well kid", the man said as he reached over to shake my hand, "My name is Urijah. Urijah Thompson"

Not exactly sure what was going on or if it'd be a good idea to tell him my real name, without even realizing really why I did it, I took his hand and said, "Buddy".

WRESTLING WITH REASONS

“Buddy,” he said back to me, “Well Buddy, where do you live? I suspect your parents are probably wondering where in the Hell you’re at”

“Yeah” I said. Truth of the matter was, I was wondering WHERE in the hell I was, and for the matter WHEN in the hell I was.