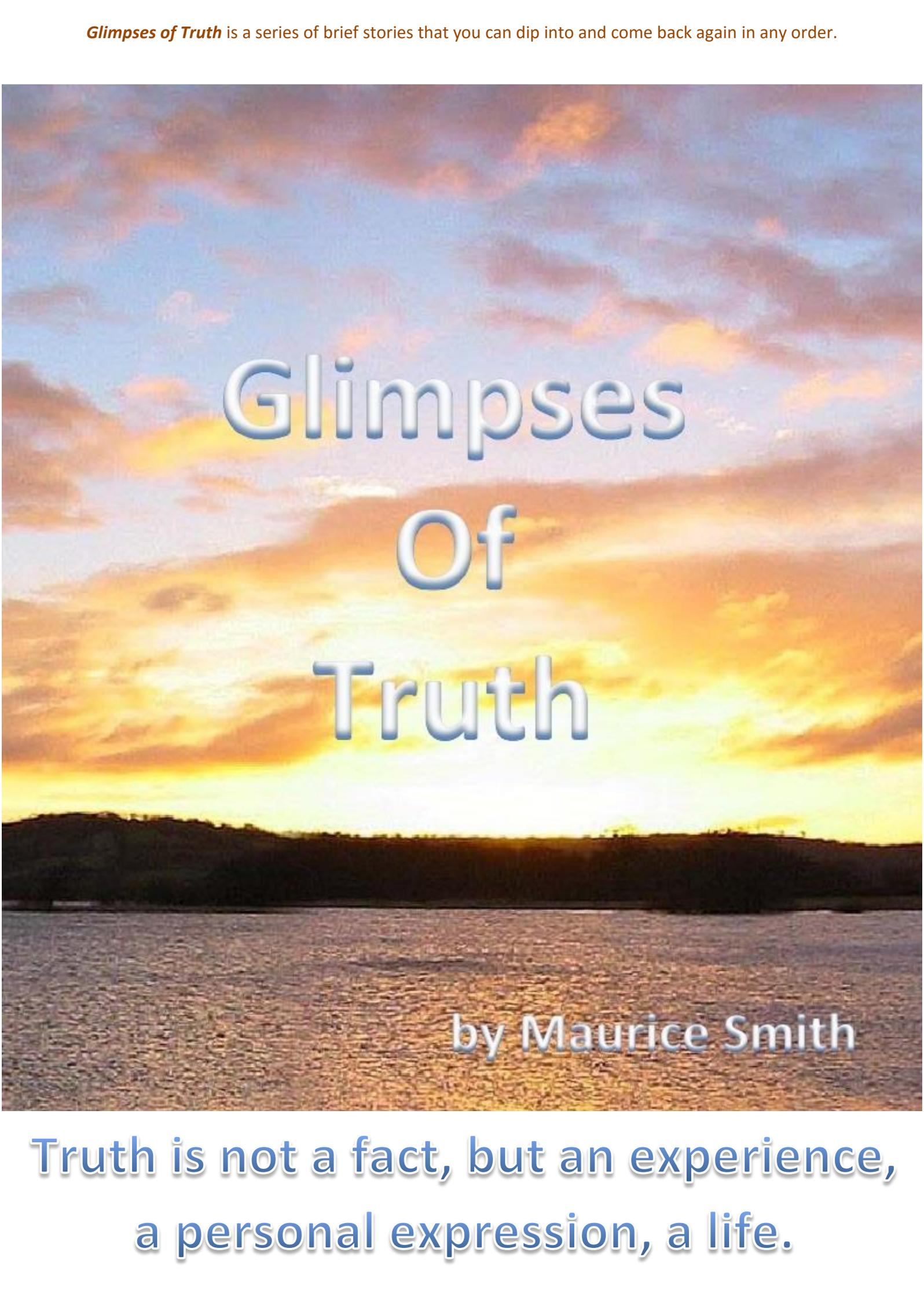


Glimpses of Truth is a series of brief stories that you can dip into and come back again in any order.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. Below the horizon, there is a dark silhouette of a landmass or hills. In the foreground, the surface of a body of water is visible, reflecting the colors of the sky.

Glimpses Of Truth

by Maurice Smith

Truth is not a fact, but an experience,
a personal expression, a life.

Glimpses Of Truth

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Preface

I am a storyteller and this is essentially a book of experience. If you are looking to get your theory right then read no further. If you are hungry for experiential truth then I hope this little book will help you for I've always believed that the person with an experience is never at the mercy of the person with an argument.

Broadly speaking the stories fall into three categories and are progressive. Part 1 gives an insight into some eye-opening information that has come my way. Part 2 opens up the - at times traumatic - experiences that have helped to turn initial information into the inner revelation that changes our lives. Part 3 tells where I am at now, sixty years after I first pinched myself at the age of sixteen and asked the age-old question, 'Can I really be here?' Maybe you've done the same?

I am aware that for many what I have shared seems to come from a mainly Christian standpoint. That is my background, but yours is equally valid and I trust it will lead you into all truth.

I wish you well.

Maurice Smith

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TRUTH . . . IS EXPERIENTIAL

It is many years since I heard the first true story that helped to radically redirect my life.

Bakt Singh had always wanted to see the sunrise on Mount Everest, in fact ever since a friend had eulogised about the sight. One day while travelling in the Himalayas he got the opportunity, but of course it meant getting up in the middle of the night. Along with a dozen others he was led by a Sherpa guide to the viewing point. The group stood quietly together in the darkness as gradually the sun rose and they could all see Everest away in the distance.

One by one the party started to turn and make their way down the hillside, but Bakt Singh remained. He turned to the guide and said, 'I am not very impressed with the sight. It is nowhere near as wonderful as I have been led to believe'.

'Stand still, Sahib' replied the Sherpa, 'and wait until the mist clears away'.

The pair stood alone gazing into the distance while the rest walked back down commenting on the distant sight they had witnessed. Maybe they were professional tourists and just wanted to tell their friends where they had been, it was evidently not essential to them for the goods to match the advertising. They had seen the event and that was enough. They were not liars, what they said was true; but it was not 'the truth'.

Bakt Singh waited in the stillness as the mists gradually cleared. He said it was as if the world's highest mountain leaped from the background to the foreground and stood before him in glorious majesty. 'I felt I could almost reach out and touch the summit' he whispered.

The others had seen the daybreak on Everest, but they had not seen nor had the same experience as Bakt Singh. He would never forget, never need to exaggerate. He had seen the living reality and received an awesome and indelible impression.

For many years I had treasured the words, 'Be still and know that I am God'. Bakt Singh helped me begin to understand them.

TRUTH . . . SETS FREE

I was not very good at ball games and usually left till near last when two captains picked the teams at school. Sports day wasn't much fun either because I could not sprint well and my eleven year old girlfriend was the Middlesex County champion.

But one day I received third prize in the hundred yards dash. Instead of liberating me into the realms of accepted sportsmen, the prizegiving bound me and made me ashamed. It was not true. I had not come third, Joyce had elevated me from fifth as she was one of the young judges. She had cheated on my behalf.

Years later, during World War II, I was called for military service. My posting was to an Infantry Training Battalion for potential leaders, where drill sergeants marched us to exhaustion and physical training instructors incessantly chased us over obstacle courses while bellowing insults in our ears.

'Smith! ... My grandmother can move faster than you!'

Came a hot summer day when the platoon lined up in full battle order - steel helmets, rifles, back packs, heavy boots, the lot. The Senior PTI barked: 'You'll run two miles down this road, round the telephone box on the village green and back. Fast as you can: MOO-OO-VE!!'. With that he threw down a few firecrackers to make sure we got off to a good start.

Once out of sight a few clever barrack-room lawyers climbed over a hedge ready to join in when we came back. It was not long before I began to wonder what was the matter with everyone, for the further we went the easier I found it to stay in front. At the halfway telephone box I was well clear when a hidden sergeant stepped out to rubber stamp the palm of my hand. It was rewarding to display this as the lads jumped back over the hedge to join me in the lead. The last I saw they were setting off in the opposite direction.

As I reached the barracks the red and black striped jerseys of the welcoming committee were plain to see. I was a clear winner and prepared myself to receive their congratulations. They were obviously surprised to see who was in front.

'Thank God you can do something, Smith!' bawled the hated senior instructor.

I was hitherto unaware of his interest in the Almighty, but the insult didn't matter. The truth was I could run long distances, I wasn't slower than his grandmother. Not true! Nothing could rob me of my achievement, I hadn't cheated this time. I can only say I felt liberated, I had discovered a truth until then locked up inside of me and my gift had been set free. I could run and had found my sport for a lifetime.

Over fifty years later I have learned that our worth does not depend on our abilities, on what we can do. We are all unique and valuable, acceptable to God without having to attain. It is participating that matters, not just winning.

I write this article on day one of the Sydney Olympic Games and I wonder how many athletes have such an attitude? Taking part, not just winning, is the sentiment encompassed in the Olympic ideal. Sadly winning has become nearly everything and for many the motto is 'Second is nowhere'.

What a tragedy. And it is not true. Thankfully I have finally learned the joy of participation and am glad just to be a runner in the race of life. We are all winners.

'To your marks '

TRUTH . . . LIGHTS UP

Truth is really not a matter of information but of revelation. Truth needs to be seen. Information may be true and a forerunner, but it is not necessarily The Truth.

Imagine this scene. A friendly infants' school teacher leaned over my desk to help me with a problem. I was usually at the bottom of the class for arithmetic, or 'sums' as we called the subject way back then. In that pre-computer age we worked with a little abacus and I can remember the lady teacher moving the beads along . . . two and two . . . three and one . . . two and one and one. Each time different combinations added up to the same total and I was well confused. Eventually, after much patience and perseverance on her part, the light dawned and I was really excited. 'Oh . . . I see', I said with obvious joy. The penny had dropped.

Actually I had 'understood', but that would not have adequately described what had happened inside me. There had been an inner illumination and what I had seen I would never unsee. I can still add well. That small incident made a lasting impression upon me.

Jesus asked Peter, 'Who do you say that I am?'. Peter appeared to answer with a statement of fact, looking just at the face value of his reply: 'You-are-the-Christ-the-son-of-the-living-God'. Full marks for correctness maybe, but that information leaves one feeling unsatisfied. It does not warrant the importance Jesus placed on his reply when he said that this truth had been revealed by his Father and as a result of this enlightenment great things would happen through Peter.

Peter didn't know the answer until it was revealed to him. Then he was able to say, 'You . . . You . . . You really are the Christ . . . You really are The Son of The Living God!' That's it! The light had dawned on him. He had revelation. Now everything would be different. Power was ignited when he was illuminated within, when he had the Light of Life. This encounter would enable Peter to cope with all his future trials, both his failures and his successes. The inner truth would have a firm grip on him.

If we take note of all the information and every injunction we read or hear, regardless of whether it lights up within us or not, then we shall be heading for trouble. We shall struggle to attain without any inner dynamic to enable us. We too need the Light of Life.

TRUTH . . . HAS A RING TO IT

A preacher came to England from abroad and was about to embark upon a tour of local churches. The moment I met this man my warning bells began to ring. There was something unclean about him. I could produce no evidence of past misdemeanours and was talked down by my peers. In fact I was criticised severely for saying that I could not trust the man. 'What evidence did I have?'. It subsequently turned out that he seduced several women while their husbands were at work. After that one prominent leader said, 'We must ask Maurice what he feels in future'. But as it turned out they usually didn't; that would have been too subjective.

Long ago a book by Canon J.B. Phillips made a deep impression on me. It was called 'The Ring of Truth' and that phrase has stayed with me ever since. Sometimes when listening to a narrative we sense, 'That doesn't ring true'. The uncertain feeling can fly in the face of the evidence and tell us that something is wrong.

Alternatively a most unlikely story can have a strange sense of authenticity which goes beyond reason. I get it when reading the four conflicting gospel accounts. In the western world we have tended to base our conclusions on logic and scientific evidence alone and have ignored our feelings. In doing so we have lost a great deal.

Consider the New Testament term 'sound doctrine'. On face value that has a heavy forbidding sense about it, but such is far from the truth. How about 'sound' as in healthy? Sound in wind and limb makes a good racehorse. An apple can be sound and very health-imparting too. Now we are beginning to focus. Nothing to cause harm or dis-ease, teaching that is life-giving, containing no words to corrupt us or curtail our joy. In the same way a bell can have a 'sound' or uncracked ring to it. How something 'rings our bell' can be the test for survival in certain circumstances.

We relegate the ring of truth - or untruth - at our peril. It is perhaps best exemplified by the woman who says that she does not like being left alone in the house with a certain man. Often the response from her partner will be that she should stop being silly. However she may be picking up bad vibes, an uncertain sound, a flaw in the ring that is not easily explained.

It is important that we learn to listen to what we hear deep inside of ourselves; what many would call a 'gut feeling'. Of course it is risky and we may make some mistakes because we are untrained and for too long have ignored the still small voice inside.

When the inner umpire is calling 'Out!' we should start to take notice and make haste slowly. I have walked roughshod over that inner registration too many times and paid a high price. Now I am learning to increasingly listen for the ring of truth, for the trumpet to sound a clear note before I rush off into battle. If I learn this well, maybe I shall suffer fewer unnecessary wounds in future.

TRUTH . . . IS ALL AROUND US

'It's a foul day, Nick' I sighed heavily as we drove towards a speaking engagement in South London. 'It's raining hard, if that's what you mean' he replied, 'But I enjoy the rain'.

That remark, made over twenty-five years ago, opened up a whole new avenue of thought to me. I realised that if upon waking I found the sun shining brightly, I seemed to get off to a much better start. It occurred to me that I had been walking through life with my eyes half-closed. Unless the scene was one of extreme and immediate impact I was switched off and I could be missing quite a lot.

I had to admit to very little appreciation of the varied creation around me. In order to see and experience more of this truth it would be necessary to begin to open my eyes to a whole new world of variety and subtlety. The opportunity soon came.

Eileen and I took a much needed winter break. We booked into a comfortable hotel in the Peak District and were both looking forward to some time together away from our responsibilities. As we left Essex on a Friday afternoon the sun was streaming down, which was unusual for mid-January. We cheerfully headed north towards the scenic delights of Derbyshire.

Arriving earlier than anticipated, we exploited the bonus of a few unexpected hours of weak winter sunshine by exploring the local dales and watercourses. We continued enjoying the scenery until darkness descended. It was both beautiful and exhilarating. After an excellent meal we retired to bed in jubilant mood : 'God's in his heaven, all's right with the world!'.

At about one o'clock I turned over in bed and was forced to acknowledge that the noise I could hear was torrential rain. I clambered out and closed the window, then curled up again and with a groan, was soon fast asleep.

Morning brought no respite, for the day was grey and wet. I very nearly slipped into my routine way of thinking, which would have meant retreating to a corner of the lounge to bury my nose in a book. But we could do that at home! Then I remembered that Nick said he enjoyed the rain, that life is not just spectacular sunrises and sunsets. There is a whole world of subtle variety to be appreciated, but enjoying it takes a little more application. You have to be at peace with yourself, for subtlety is not always immediately rewarding. We cannot demand instant gratification.

So we decided on the hills. While some of the other guests huddled into easy chairs, we climbed into the MG sports car we had borrowed for the weekend and cautiously nosed our way out of the long driveway. The car interior soon misted up and I had to lower the side window to clear it. In came a few spots of uninvited rain. Having experienced a change of attitude I noticed that these rain drops were quite refreshing and not at all unwelcome. As we pressed on, dark cloud formations drew our attention to the ever-changing pattern of the sky. I noticed for the first time in my life that grey was not always just grey; there were different shades of grey. Until then I had felt it was a colour we could well do without - and today it is still not my favourite.

Suddenly the wind got up and swept the clouds rapidly across our vision. The heavy rain stopped for a moment and a tantalising snatch of blue sky opened up, seemingly full of promise. We found ourselves absorbed by the natural creation in quite a new way. I was certainly more at peace than usual, when I would have been indulging continual complaints about the foul British weather and

a ruined weekend. We were sincerely happy as we watched the patch of blue disappear and were plunged once more into heavy cloud.

Before our forty-eight hours were over we had experienced a crash course in the elements. Rain, sun, wind and even a smattering of sleet and snow for good measure. What a great weekend it was. It could have been a miserable 'wash out' if my thinking had remained unchanged. Instead we had really enjoyed the whole experience, not just the bright periods.

'You are worthy, for you created all things, and for your pleasure they were created', seemed an apt summary as we headed happily home. It wasn't true that life was meant to be always full of intensely satisfying purpose and heart-stopping beauty. There would be bland ordinary periods, perhaps a backdrop to the more exotic times we experience? But not to be ignored.

Every moment and every situation is part of the fabric of life and can be consciously entered into. No need to run from dark experiences and painful circumstances. They may be too dire to be overtly enjoyed, but they play their part in the development of a full-orbed life. So I am slowly learning not to constantly berate God to change things, but as these pages will reveal, it is taking a lifetime to become a master in the art of living.

TRUTH . . . IS INTUITIVE

The Iron Curtain had done its best to shut out western enthusiasts, but we were young and adventurous. Before long we had discovered underground Christians in several countries and were making clandestine visits with money and literature, in addition to speaking at their secret rendezvous.

One night, literally under the ground in a basement in Prague, I had been speaking to a group of young people. They were stirred by my message and I could see a new resolve to be bold. Once I had finished the pastor rose purposefully to his feet and spoke very seriously. My interpreter told me he was warning everyone to ignore what I had said as their obvious excitement could lead to imprisonment. It was alright for me, he said, I would soon be returning to safety in England. That hadn't occurred to me, but I can understand now his concern for those headstrong young people.

The next day I was walking the streets of Prague depressed that my efforts had been so frustrated, concerned that the pastor had put out the spiritual fire I had ignited. But what could I do? I had such a language limitation.

An imposing building caught my eye and I had a strange desire to go inside. After a moment's hesitation I crossed the road, climbed the steps and pushed open the door. To my surprise I was confronted with a whole library full of books I could not understand. Wandering around and wondering why I had followed my intuition, I caught sight of a notice which read English Section and then a sub-heading Religion. Tucked away in a corner there were a few books under the further heading of Mystics.

I reached up and took down one of the books. Opening at the frontispiece I saw a few words written in large print:

Some hounds run because they have seen the hare,
Some hounds run because the other hounds are running.

In an instant I was at peace, returned the book, and strode away. There was nothing to worry about. If those young people had caught sight of the One I was enthusing over, they would be OK. They would last the course. Nothing would deter them from following my Man of Galilee - and probably with a little more wisdom too after the exhortation from their elder statesman.

I was so glad I had responded to that inner impulse, that gentle intuitive pull that had drawn me into a foreign library. I had discovered further truth in a profound couplet I would never forget and one that in future years would affect the lives of many more young people as I told the story again and again.

TRUTH . . . IS A MYSTERY

We were in London's theatreland. My wife and I had just witnessed the final scene of *The Mousetrap*, a record-breaking play by Agatha Christie. We had sat through two hours of mystery.

Once we had learned 'whodunnit' a member of the cast stepped through the centre curtains and asked us not to tell our friends, not to spoil their enjoyment - perhaps also not to ruin future attendance and profit!

As we mounted the stairs in the circle to leave the building I noticed an atmosphere quite different to the normal chatter that follows most theatre performances. Hundreds of people were making a rather hushed exit together. My wife had not noticed this until I pointed it out, but then I have always been ultra-sensitive to atmosphere. 'You're right' she said, 'It is different.'

Things quickly returned to normal once we emerged on to the West End street, but mulling the matter over as we walked I soon realised what had happened. We had all shared in the sense of a mystery, a secret finally revealed. There was a sense of the esoteric. Somehow we were all held quietly together; to say we had bated breath would be to exaggerate, but it came close to it.

That is how I understand spiritual truth to be. A series of discoveries which deeply affect us and give us a sense of wonder. However, it seems to me we shall never fully understand. The sense of mystery will always be there. In fact as we progress it will probably increase. The more we know, the more we shall realise there is to know. Perhaps like learned astronomers whose every discovery leads to an even further unfathomable dimension.

Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be explored, as a friend of mine once gently informed me. I liked that. It could be trite to say that all our problems are hidden opportunities, for many of life's experiences are painful and extremely distressing. Yet I do believe there is truth within that statement, though it may not always be prudent to say so.

Those who assert they have 'solved the problem' of Truth once and for all, those for whom all the evidence is in, never experience a continuing sense of unfolding wonder. However real our initial encounter with truth, we need an on-going sense of exploration for the thrill of living to be constant.

Surely even the hereafter will be just another step into the unknown, into the wonder of discovery, albeit a colossal step and one which every one of us must eventually take. Death, that most eloquent of preachers, still remains a true mystery however sure we may feel of our destiny. And somehow I am strangely glad it does. The songwriter declared a great truth when she wrote, 'The soul afraid of dying has never learned to live' and we can be thankful when that fear has lost its grip and we are content to live with mystery, even with paradox if need be.

TRUTH . . . IS SOMETIMES HIDDEN

A child introduced me to the Magic Eye books.

They contain coloured prints in very intricate patterns, which although intriguing in themselves, when stared at with eyes leisurely focused just beyond the surface of the page, reveal a hidden secret.

If we develop patience and the ability to relax - or be still - and look beyond the obvious outward appearance, something magical happens. The pictures are suddenly revealed as three dimensional and often incredibly beautiful. Life is like that.

Over-concentration is a great hindrance, but while some concentrate too hard, others are content with just the surface view. Neither experience the hidden revelations that at times can be staggering. Thankfully, being a bit of a dreamer, I can usually 'see through' and experience what others, for all their intensity, cannot see.

Truth is the reality that lies beyond the surface appearance. When Jesus said 'I am the Truth', he was not claiming to be the ultimate embodiment of accurate doctrine or dogma, rather that he was the key to the very essence of being, the kernel of true life.

His closest friend John stated, 'We beheld (kept looking at) his glory, he was full of grace and truth', He said this after Jesus had turned one hundred and fifty gallons of water into wine; but that wasn't what hit his disciples so forcibly. They looked beyond the evident occurrence and saw through to the real miracle. It was that Jesus slipped away without anyone knowing that he had saved the day. He let the bridegroom get all the credit. He is like that, such grace is part of his glory - and that is the truth!

Truth is not to be found lying carelessly around on the surface of a holy book or in a religious building; it is the unveiling of the heart of a 'God who hides himself'.

TRUTH . . . BRINGS PATIENCE

The scene was our local petrol station forecourt and for a change the automatic car wash was in working order. Not only in working order but devoid of the line of cars so often there to test my patience. Not one single car in sight.

Parking by the pay office I obtained my token and eagerly drove round to the washing machine entrance. What's this? Another car slipped in before me? Not only that, there's no driver in it. Only his wife and children. I began to fume.

The better part of me whispered, 'Calm down Maurice, you're in no hurry. You can sit back and enjoy your John Williams' tape'. So I leaned back and enjoyed the music. Of course, this is better. What's the urgency anyway? Two minutes later . . . Where on earth is the bloke!?

'Keep calm. Rest back. It is minutes we're on about, not hours'.

Oh yes, sorry, I forgot; I expect he's parked first and gone for his token . . . What am I saying? Parked first! That's not fair! I'll have a word with his wife (politely of course) then look for the man himself. What does he think he's up to? I was here first.

All the while a voice within was persisting, 'Cool it, cool it', but my adrenalin was now pumping and breaking through my peace barrier. I jumped out of the car leaving the engine running and the automatic selector column safely in neutral. I guess I must have closed the door rather heavily (slammed is such an aggressive word) because although the car was stationary as I got out, while I was talking to the lady in front, I turned to see it moving at considerable speed in reverse. The door was still shut and there was no-one inside.

I panicked and chased furiously after the phantom vehicle, quickly realising by the increasing speed that the manual choke was still out. I failed to reach the monster before it charged through a ten foot high white fence and came to rest against a lorry wheel in the adjoining car park. There it stood with the bonnet protruding defiantly through the jagged opening.

Oh my! This wasn't going to look good on the accident report and I didn't fancy my explanation to the filling station owner either. Standing there inspecting the crumpled rear end and the shattered fencing, I momentarily wondered if it would be a good idea to slip quietly away.

I would need to phone the insurance broker too. Oh my goodness - I'd only had the car a month and they were already involved trying to settle a claim for an incident when I had misjudged my distance and dented the front end coming out of a car park. I realised this was going to ruin my no claims bonus. Thoughts of taking an advanced driver certificate were relegated by about twenty-five years.

Self-pity set in. Maybe I should give up driving? Or emigrate!

'No. I'd just like you to listen to that still small voice whispering that patience is a virtue. I'd like you to stop fretting and fussing, to realise that life can't be rushed. As I said, enjoy your John Williams' music.'

The moral of this story is: Never leave an automatic car with the engine running, it could shudder into gear and take off.

'No it isn't, Maurice! The moral is, "Those who are led by the inner spirit are the (grown up) sons and daughters of God."'

Of course things could have been worse. The car could have hit and injured someone. It was an annoying incident, but not too expensive, except in terms of pride. Quite inexpensive really if it began to teach me to 'slow down, you move too fast' - which, ironically, was a song I was always singing around that time. The advice was further confirmed by a three-year-old little lady in Florida when she said boldly word for word, 'Maurice, you move too fast!'

I always get in line now before purchasing my token and I am slowing down . . . gradually. 'Pace kills, never distance' is a watchword for marathon runners and probably should be for us all.

TRUTH . . . IS PROGRESSIVE

Two thousand years ago the apostle John recorded these words, 'I write to you little children because your sins are forgiven; I write to you young men because you have overcome the evil one; I write to you fathers because you know Him who was from the beginning'. Children, young men, fathers. It was obviously a male dominated society from which we have now escaped.

However, John had a right sense of progression. He knew there was nothing wrong with living comfortably at different stages of life. I am minded to say how sad it is that we have largely lost such an attitude, when children are now urged to grow old prematurely with all the havoc that ensues. Let them enjoy themselves is a plea from my heart!

The issue we are considering is that of maturity. It is a very healthy start for us to know that our independence from God is forgiven. I use that phrase because independence from a higher authority is the only real 'sin' in my book. Continuing through life as an infant, demanding instant gratification, has led to the crammed conditions in penal institutions, ever replenished with those who are a law unto themselves, who have never been lovingly taught otherwise. Instruction, unilateral forgiveness and total acceptance mark the pathway to willing submission, to learning a responsible way to live. Believing the world revolves around our individual life and that we can selfishly run our own show, leads to all kinds of childish mischief. Pride certainly does precede a fall. I've been there!

Then there are the many idealistic young people, all too ready to fight the evils of the world and that cannot be a bad thing. They are so often aware of injustice and so conclude a colossal simplistic battle between right and wrong. I spent a long time clambering among the branches of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before I realised how inter-twined they were.

Increasing maturity eventually brings more truth, the peaceful understanding that in spite of stark evidence to suggest otherwise, everything is going to work out right in the end. There is no big contest. There will be the happy ending we long for. Julian of Norwich's most famous utterance, made many centuries ago, rings down the corridors of time, true as ever: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'. That lady had great revelation and a father heart. It gives younger followers great encouragement and security to be around those with such firm and quiet assurance. And history has taught us we don't have to be old in years to be mature.

The point is, each stage is OK and is the truth for those involved. We need to know there is something intrinsically very right with us as we grow spiritually. Constantly emphasising mistakes and shortcomings, or trying to force-grow others to see our point of view, leads to a poor sense of self-worth and sadly that seems the main thrust of most religious organisations.

If we just step outside ourselves now and then, we may thankfully observe that we are growing up into a restful and sure knowledge that there is a Heart and an Intelligence behind all things. This constant all-pervading Spirit has been around from the beginning, as John wrote, and is allowing everything to work out for eventual good. It is remarkable how true saints, like Madame Guyon and Dame Julian, found this truth in the midst of persecution and suffering. For this to happen we surely need to be gripped by a sense of an eternal reality, especially when we survey the horror existing in the world today and breaking out like an angry carcinoma across the whole body of humanity.

Even as I write these words I am consumed with personal grief, but I am also undergirded by a sense of ultimate well-being; I know 'Him who was from the beginning', so maybe at long last I am becoming a little father. Let's hope so.

TRUTH . . . IS PERSONIFIED

I used to think we needed men and women with a message. Now I know that we are the message.

Britain's senior politician recently delivered a moralising speech about money not being everything, about nurses needing a sense of vocation even if they took less pecuniary rewards than others in society. Fine stuff I thought, but why don't you kick-start the self-denial trend? This leader is highly paid and also married to a barrister with huge earnings. Of course he may well be a generous man, but this is not the point. His expensive lifestyle was well beyond those he was urging to live on less. Inevitably they would read his lifestyle, not just his words.

There was a time when my capacity to produce inspiring messages completely dried up. It was quite a shock for I made my living by public speaking. 'What's happening now?' I cried to the heavens. 'I have given up a lucrative secular job, embarked upon this grand trusting crusade and now I have no ministry!'

My familiar inner whisper started another conversation:

'You are going to learn to preach Christ not concepts.'

What on earth does that mean?

'You could preach Eileen, couldn't you?'

That's different, I've lived with her for years, I know how she ticks, I know the tone of her voice...

'Precisely!'

Obviously it was time for me to ponder once again. This brought me to the realisation that there were many Eileens around, but I would only have to hear someone describing her behaviour, her demeanour and her unpressurising attitude to know if it was likely to be my Eileen or not. For, like us all, she is unique.

Over recent decades there have been many 'Christs' declared, usually demanding we abandon our common sense and own inner witness, often with disastrous results, even mass suicides, sexual promiscuity, denial of natural family relationships, harsh regimes, control over people's lives and - almost inevitably - monetary demands. All this is veiled as serving God. These bogus claims have preyed upon our insecurity and vulnerability.

We do not need to encounter highly charismatic personalities who are persuasive with words, nor speakers with grand ideologies or with some rigid teaching called 'The Gospel'. What makes all the difference to our lives is an encounter with the presence of God. A quickening, usually located inside ourselves. We all have our own gospel, our own good news, which may differ from that of others. This may not come through an overtly religious experience involving holy men, holy books and holy places, or with special this or special that. There is nothing to sign and nothing to join. A spiritual encounter may happen gradually or suddenly. It can come while wearing our old blue jeans or our best pinstripe.

I am speaking of a breaking down of barriers between sacred and secular, barriers to discovering the life and person of God everywhere and in everything. Infuriating of course to those who insist that Omnipresence be located only in their place and in their way.

For me, though perhaps not for you, the first remembered realisation of the presence of God was located in a Man who was a humble carpenter and was nailed up to die in his early thirties. Jesus looked no different to those about him we learn, but he grew up to know he was The Son of God - the incarnation. I found I could trust him personally, not in so-called facts and teachings about a virgin birth, a sacrifice or a physical resurrection.

I have discovered at some cost that not everyone wants The Christ to be too human. Incantations of 'Very God of very God, very man of very man' may be acceptable dogma to many until one begins to flesh out how this 'very man' lived his daily life among rugged fishermen, swindling tax-gatherers and alluring prostitutes. Speaking at a conference in Minnesota I heard angry cries of 'Heresy!' 'Licence!' and 'Sit down!' as I told of my own love for the Friend of Sinners who loved people for themselves, not because they represented good conversion material.

He was 'touched with the feelings of our infirmities' as Bible teachers are keen to point out; but when I suggested he may well have been turned on when Mary Magdalene washed his feet with her hair, these leaders were incensed. As usual, temptation was confused with sin by those who so insistently proclaim. 'He was tempted in all points such as we are'. I suppose he was not supposed to actually feel the infirmities after all. Was his humanity somehow contained in a kind of holy remote control? How I hate this sanitised religion.

Thankfully that memorable night, just as happened 2,000 years ago, 'The common people heard him gladly'. It is the religious, or the important leaders, who so often want a stained glass window Jesus, a self-righteous Holy Joe preferring the company of Pharisees.

One liberating truth reminds us that the very life that was in him is in us. God himself is the light that lights everyone that comes into the world. Sometimes that light has become darkness and we need to help each other discover the true light inside ourselves. When such illumination occurs we know we have not encountered a creed, a doctrine, a plan of salvation or a new culture, but the living heart of the person of God that beats inside the whole universe. We are one with every created thing.

When we have 'ears to hear' we may find that heart beating in the most unusual places. God so often revealed in very ordinary containers, those who do not command a second glance. How true it is that the sweetest people on earth are often quite unknown. Although they have been entrusted with small abilities yet they still love and serve. Their intrinsic goodness is sometimes concealed within the coarsest exteriors. God's gentle might was declared through a Man who brandished a whip to the temple money changers. I am sure that many who resist his humanity feel he just managed to miss them.

Let's keep our eyes peeled and our senses attuned to locate great treasure displayed in unlikely places; in those who are themselves the message of the hour. For I think truth is unlikely to be revealed through strident verbosity and those with a love for great outward success or pedantic accuracy.

TRUTH . . . AND THE IMAGINATION

A strong imagination is a wonderful gift, but one not possessed by all. Those who lack in this area seem to miss much of the excitement of life yet are likely to be compensated by a much smoother ride.

My wife and I illustrate the point perfectly. Innumerable times I have said to her, 'This place is not how I imagined it. How about you?' Eileen's inevitable reply would be, 'I didn't think about it'. She waits until arrival to see what a place is like. Although she thoroughly enjoys every moment of the present, there is no savouring of the future and no disappointment on arrival.

So often the reverse is true in my case. When the 'sports facilities' prove not to be a full scale fitness suite and an Olympic size pool, but one small table tennis table, then I regret having substituted a vivid imagination for an intelligent enquiry. Eileen and I would have done better to work together.

However, that is not a serious application of the issue; but think of the pain caused by undisciplined imagination whilst waiting for the results of a personal scan, or speculating on the development of a serious illness in the case of a loved one.

Of course insisting we cease to dwell on morbid possibilities can be like telling a hungry child he can think about anything he wants to - except a Big Mac! Forbidding seems to increase the attraction.

When my fertile imagination begins to run amok, leading me into the dangerous paths of Possible Dire Consequences, I know it is time to rest back, take a few deep breaths, indulge a wry smile at past inaccuracies and return to the present moment. 'We don't know that; it may not be the truth of the matter' I tell myself. Then, in my weakness, I lean inward into the One who is my true inner life. Years ago I learned the truth that 'Of myself I can do nothing' (to quote the words of Jesus), but now I was learning that everything is possible to those whose weakness is infused with divine strength. It is taking a painfully long time to perfect this understanding as I will explain in a later chapter which covers my experience with a neuropsychologist. It seems I need a lot of help from a lot of people!

You may object that a strong imagination is not a weakness, and I would agree that it can be a tremendous asset sparking off a creativity to bring satisfaction and serve our fellow man. I have also repeatedly found that our strengths can invariably become our weaknesses too. We can go over the top. Armed with this foreknowledge we have nothing to fear as our imagination comes under control. We can return to the truth now and not follow outrageous thoughts. That is likely to lead to us being less dissipated and so better equipped to cope with whatever happens when it happens.

TRUTH . . . IS ESTABLISHED IN ADVERSITY

As you will most surely have gathered by now, I have worried in earnest for most of my life. I am sure I hold the British record and it is one I am not proud of. Worrying has done inestimable harm to me emotionally and physically, for the welfare of the mind and the body are undoubtedly linked. Even though my stressed condition caused concern to those close to me I could not turn off the anxiety.

The seeds of my condition are so easily traced back to heredity and especially to my early environment. I remember being warned of danger lurking everywhere. A trip to the swimming pool was likely to lead to drowning, crossing the road was always linked to being 'knocked down', and swallowing an orange pip could so easily lead to appendicitis, peritonitis and even death!

My wife does not know how to worry. She simply knows it is a pointless and unproductive exercise - we'll hear soon enough if anything has gone wrong. Thankfully she has been very understanding with my weakness.

I was clearly tiring of this pernicious condition when I confided the details to friends in Wisconsin. Their reply contained the helpful information that my worries were only thoughts and suggested I should remind myself of that when plagued by uninvited intrusions in my mind. All I can say is that the timing must have been perfect, for I found I was able to clearly see the truth of this statement and begin to do as my friends suggested. I sensed a new day was dawning in my experience. But gradually. If past experience was anything to go by there would probably be some deeply practical application ahead to firmly entrench this revealed truth.

Two months later, while sitting in a Canterbury restaurant with Eileen and a visiting friend from Florida, I found I could not hold myself erect nor move the left side of my body. It was evident I had suffered a stroke and I was soon stretchered off to hospital. Unable to move about under my own steam I needed a month in the recovery ward and finally home visits meant being pushed around the village in a wheelchair. Used to seeing me about in running gear, the locals thought I had fallen over while out training. I found I had so much to cope with that I had no spare energy to worry about other people, not even for my close family who had always been the constant targets of my worrying disposition. Strangely enough this attitude continued and once discharged I found it relatively easy to dismiss worrying thoughts as perverse and uninvited guests. I didn't resist them, but smiled and watched them pass me by. I concentrated on getting mobile again and really began to understand what hard work was. When I overtook my first human being - a very old lady dragging a shopping trolley! - it was to me the equivalent of an Olympic gold medal.

Intrusive thoughts did not give up easily, they had received a welcome for too long. But this was another day. 'I am not a worrier' I told myself, 'Just plagued with unwanted worrying thoughts'. (If you are tempted to think this is mere semantics, that I play with words, please believe me these words made a great difference to my enjoyment of living.) You see, I just did not own these invasive thoughts. This was not the well advertised Power of Positive Thinking with all the strain of striving to remember to think correctly and say the right words. I was not whistling in the dark. I knew what I was saying was the truth. These unwanted worries did not originate in the deepest and holiest part of my being, they were not what I really wanted or believed.

Easily persisting with this truthful attitude I continued to let any negative destructive thoughts slip past me. Let me repeat, I did not resist unwanted thoughts or distressing feelings in my body, for I

knew by bitter experience that what we resist persists. Like a reed bending in the wind I suppose, if it resisted the force it would snap.

If I failed, then I accepted the pain this inevitably brought. This quiet acceptance obviously stopped the flow of any further adrenalin and anxieties subsided. Lessons I had read about long ago, in the valued writings of the saintly doctor Claire Weekes, began to pay off and I was learning to undo the habits of a lifetime.

I now realise how often severe adversity can change our perspective by giving us no alternative but to focus on the present moment. I don't promise never to worry again, but I feel quietly confident I will be living on a different level. And the demon of Worry has been exposed, not as a constant winner but as a fraud, and his beloved adversity turned to my advantage.

TRUTH . . . CAN BE PAINFUL

Sometimes it seems we'll never get an answer to some of our hang-ups. The Divine Providence seems either deaf or uninterested. At times like this illumination eludes us as we ache to move ahead for the benefit of ourselves and others suffering with us. This has been particularly the case with regard to my inordinate concern for my family and my constant failure to let them live their own lives. Doubtless another form of the worrying disposition I have referred to before.

'You've never let them go!' my well-meaning colleagues would often say. Easier said than done. But God knows I wanted to get off their backs, for my overbearing concern has been a lifelong attitude which hasn't done them any good at all. There is a world of difference between being available for someone and driving them crazy with attempts to prevent their suffering.

A short while ago, in some desperation over my possessiveness, I considered the use of a hypnotherapist. There is very little I haven't considered! Maybe he could uncover the reason I was always molly-coddling? Prayer and counselling had not succeeded, that's for certain. Of course, as usual, I was looking for an instant cure-all, but soon learned that it might take months of treatment, painful tears and possibly boxes of tissues to uncover the root cause of the problem. I decided to postpone that approach as I had been warned against stress by the consultant after my recent stroke.

Then God moved 'in a mysterious way' and caught me by surprise. I say 'God', but I trust by now you have realised that although I could not adequately describe him, I see his hand in everything. Talking with a friend of mine who is a psychotherapist and was then also a vicar at the same time, we were travelling over familiar ground about my persistent feeling of sadness even though being the life and soul of the party. I knew it all sprang from way back in early childhood, but all those fears sown by my adoptive mother and the late discovery of the adoption itself, didn't seem to account for the emotion of sadness. There was something else causing this. Though what it was and what it had to do with my possessiveness, I could not see. Then suddenly and inexplicably, while we were just talking, I knew what the problem was that had dominated my early years and was causing continual sadness now.

I was lonely.

Loneliness was somewhere, somehow, at the root of all this over-caring I was sure. Now I was in possession of new information, but I didn't see how it could help me at all. I remembered having an inkling of this years before, but had been told by a prominent Christian minister not to be so self-centered!

Concurrently I was re-reading a splendid novel by Susan Howatch in which an Anglican Bishop was experiencing severe problems relating to his grown children. The cause was revealed not as their problems but his own reaction to them. Like me he was an ex-Army man and I identified with him immediately. He was inflicting his own problems, and his erroneous reading of their problems, on to his family. And so was I. If I was lonely, then they must be lonely too and need my constant attention.

Sitting up in bed with my book laid aside I found myself transported back in time to scenes I had completely forgotten. Times when I had felt desperately lonely in my earliest years. An only child, parents forty-five years old when they adopted me and with no understanding of my young world.

They could not relate to me. There was virtually no real contact between us. 'You only eat and sleep here' my mother used to complain. What else was there to do? There were no games to play, no books to read, nothing to do but go out and rake the streets. No TV in those days. Mum was ill and inactive and Dad worked terribly long hours in a factory. It was a very lonely life.

Suddenly I began to weep - yes, at seventy-two years of age - as I actually felt the pain of loneliness surface from deep inside. Dad had been a boxer, but I was rather a weakling and quite a coward, so I got bullied at school. But all he could say was, 'The bigger they are the heavier they fall, son!' That didn't seem to work if you were running away, and I've always been a good runner!

Memory after memory came flooding back - I won't bore you with them all - and the tears kept flooding out. The hypnotherapist had been right about the tissues. As I cried I could see why I had clung to my grown children so much. I had thought it was because they needed me, but it was because I also needed them to stave off my loneliness.

I have so many friends, but I have always felt lonely without pin-pointing the problem. No wonder I left their 'We love you Maurice' cards on display for so long. I had to feel popular and would go to any length to make sure I didn't offend you with the possibility of losing your friendship.

My wife and I have a light-hearted agreement that she doesn't die first because I am completely inept and can hardly boil an egg. But now I realise that is not the true reason for the jocular arrangement. The fact is I don't want to be left alone. I'll be lonely again! I have probably developed this ineptitude to a fine art, for women often enjoy looking after a weak man. Many men hide behind their strengths, but I have hidden behind my weaknesses. We can be so adept at protecting ourselves from pain that we usually don't know we are doing it.

Well now I do know. The truth is out. Somehow I begin to know it will make a difference and take me a further step forward on my journey. I have tried to help my family across the road without them walking in the puddles, but they have eyes of their own. They are not my responsibility now. I can be here if they need me, as I know they are available for me; but we are equals now. We are all adults. I am sure a loosened grip will begin to reduce my anxiety level and increase their self-confidence. That can't be bad.

But it was a painful process and is obviously not the end of the road. Hopefully I will be changing until the last day of my life. As a family we have known quite a lot of pain - many people have - but I become increasingly sure that somehow it is all inter-mingling for good in the long run. Meanwhile the suffering in our lives and in the world at large is bellowing out the very opposite. I can only say that what I feel is a quiet conviction and not a blind faith. Something that has taken hold of me, not a doctrine that I am desperately trying to hang on to. I am grateful for such an assurance although inevitably it is assailed by doubts at times, but that is a healthy challenge.

Now another new day seems to be finally dawning and I am beginning to anticipate a more restful period for the concluding years of my life; no doubt it will involve still more learning, but nevertheless some respite and a time when I am not obsessed with the affairs of my family, just grateful to every one of them for the friendship and richness they continually add to my life.

TRUTH . . . ENDS SEPARATION

You have by now realised that I usually rendezvous with truth at Wit's End Corner. Perhaps when all human strength is expended and my raging soul exhausted into listening stillness. Then I seem to become utterly real and honest, holding nothing back, ready to hear, whatever the content. It is evidently not that way for everyone, although I am convinced that seed which falls into honest ground does bear much fruit.

As I have indicated, suffering can play a great part in the discovery of truth and I am just now reminded of a time when I was once more experiencing an aching sadness, sharing the pain of those close to me. In this emotional condition I turned on the TV for the six o'clock news and was assailed further by the intense suffering of maimed and dying children in the Balkans, of torn families wrenched apart by ethnic atrocities. On top of my own personal sorrow it was the final straw. I retired to my bedroom and cried myself out.

With what breath I had left, I complained to the One who had created everything and who seemed to have deserted his handiwork, declining yet again to intervene. From my perspective, 'The whole creation was groaning and travailing together in pain' - to quote a familiar passage from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. But doctrine was not going to help me now. Once again I needed a life-giving touch.

'Don't you ever cry?' I croaked bitterly, 'I know the Son of God identified with our lot, but that was two thousand years ago . . . what about today? Don't you cry over the terrible anguish in the world right now?' My searing complaint was along those lines, but I didn't expect an answer. I was just unloading.

That was when the rare but familiar stillness descended. I knew better than to move. Lying face down on my bed I could almost feel the weight of the silence and my arguments ceased. I will never be able to exaggerate the import of the words that rose within me:

'I am lying on that bed crying now, son . . .'

That was all. But it was enough. My grief had caused me to forget what I had learned through many years of experience - that God and I were one; He was All and in All. I can only simply tell you that the divine encounter further changed my perspective, as it always does. I once again realised that the Creator and the creation were wrapped up in one bundle of life. He was not merely transcendent, sitting far above our suffering, but was feeling it all now. He was not only living in us, but as us. I already knew this as a fact, but obviously a deeper experiential knowing was needed to bring solace to a man sick with sorrow and exhaustion.

This may not have been the plan we would have opted for, but it is evident we do not see the whole or final picture. I resided in Romford, a town in the county of Essex, for thirteen years, where Francis Quarles lived in the seventeenth century. He exhorted his fellows not to 'judge the play before the final act' and I recalled these timely words as something of God's peace began to course through my veins once more.

Even without all the answers, we can go forward knowing we go as God, ever in human weakness and dependence, but undergirded by a quiet confidence. We are secure in the knowledge that He is in us and we are in Him. Some of us will make an obvious impact, some a behind-the-scenes

contribution, but all of us hopefully not too aware of any good we may do. We are just being ourselves.

'For me to live is Christ' belongs to us in the twenty-first century as much as to the writer's contemporaries in the first. If the Christ of Galilee should ever say to us, 'When I was thirsty you gave me a drink, when I was in prison you visited me', hopefully we would reply, 'When did we do this, Lord?'. But in deeper moments we understand a little more. To embrace another living soul is to embrace God. There is no separation, we are all of a piece. Harmony is restored to our understanding. I believe much of our travail is to bring us to this inner knowledge, so that even though we may so often seem part of the problem, we know we are also part of the answer.

I do not pretend this knowledge will satisfy all our questing or remove all the mystery, but it does cause us to possess a quiet peace within the turmoil existing at the turn of another century. It can put the mystical power of resurrection into bodies that sometimes hardly have the strength to take the next step. There is joy in the midst of our sorrow.

God is here at Wit's End Corner, and that is the truth.

TRUTH . . . IS INCLUSIVE

We were aboard the morning flight to JFK. My wife had claimed her usual window seat and I waited to see who would complete our row of three. Presently we were joined by a middle-aged lady dressed in a beautiful sari. She occupied the aisle seat next to me.

Our conversation flowed easily as we cruised at thirty thousand feet. I soon discovered she had flown from Bombay several hours before and was on the second leg of her journey to relatives in New York. Her home was on Marine Parade, known to me as 'The String of Pearls', so named because of the sweep of the lamps along the Bombay coastline. As I had served in the Indian Army many years before and knew her location, this made an immediate point of contact.

Showing little signs of fatigue, the gracious lady insisted upon getting us whatever we needed from the stewardess. As we talked of India and England, and the differences in culture and religion, it was evident that even if our understanding was different, we were of one spirit. There was no inner clash, no stridency, no insistence that our view was the only correct one.

My understanding of God had come through my encounter with Christ, hers through the many expressions of God that her Hindu upbringing had taught her. Thankfully we did not try to convert one another, but spent hours listening to each other; engrossed, fascinated, enlarged and thoroughly grateful to have met. As we prepared to leave the aircraft our new friend touched my arm and I saw she had tears in her eyes. She said quietly, 'How do people cope in the world today, Maurice, without knowing God?'

The age difference, the miles, the cultures, the religions, had all been spanned because we wanted to learn from each other; because we all acknowledged there was a light that lights everyone that comes into the world and we sought that light in each other. Our journey across the ocean was a sheer delight, instead of a head-on collision between two opponents.

The warmth of that encounter lasted a very long time and returns whenever I recall the flight. I realise more than ever that I do not have to deny my own experience of God to grant that someone else also has a valid history. Three non-judgemental souls had shared the happy hours, served each other and talked of God and his world. That would have been impossible in my former hard-line days when I belonged to an exclusive club and thought mine the only true story, my name for the Almighty the only acceptable name. I am sure that He (do pardon me ladies!) has no problem. My offspring call me the names of quirky TV personalities like Victor Meldrew and Captain Mainwaring, but what does that matter if they love me? I am not worried because I know who I am, and I'm quite sure God has no identity crisis.

Jesus Christ, the one who made all my house lights come on, taught me how to draw a big circle and be inclusive. I believe he would have been horrified if I had failed to discern the true spirit of the Indian lady and quibbled with her about correct words, which are surely but clumsy symbols of inner truth.

TRUTH . . . IS NOT BLACK AND WHITE

As I draw to the end of my story you will remember that in an earlier chapter I related my experience on a grey wet week-end in the English Peak District. This learning curve has been hugely intensified during my recent 'dark night' of depression and frustration; but the reward is proving inestimable.

It seems that there are a few occasions in our lifetime when we make great strides forward and know things will never be quite the same again. At least that appears true for those of a certain temperament. During my seventy-four years sojourn there have been four such important instances that readily come to mind and the most recent is still making its impact upon me every day.

Of course although we may make these gigantic leaps forward and all the house lights may come on at once - to badly mix our metaphors - usually the process has been lengthy, even if the capstone is put in place suddenly. My stone was lowered by a post-stroke neuropsychologist who pointed out that even though I had taught many people about the need to live in the grey areas of life, I still operated in black and white mode myself. That is the way I had solved problems all through my life. But of course others, like Adolf Hitler and Margaret Thatcher to quote extremes, have done the same (though I do not infer they make happy bedfellows) and the long term results have been devastating in very different ways. So have many of my impetuous decisions based as they have been upon a negative and unrealistic outlook.

Now it was the time to consolidate the earlier lessons of correct thinking. Thankfully my consultant did not say I had to become a positive thinker, for I have always known that becoming positive was not the answer to my negativity. So many breakdowns have been caused by trying to pull ourselves up by our bootlaces. There was a need to appraise each situation in the light of reality, of the true facts as best known to me at the time.

Depression had settled on me about a year after I suffered the stroke that had reduced me to constant inactivity. The stroke was soon to be followed by tragic family circumstances that it would be insensitive to unveil here. Being out of circulation and unavailable meant my correspondence dropped drastically when I failed to reply. That and the advent of e-mail. Visitors could not come because I soon became over-tired. In addition to my incapacity and the tragedy, I now had to cope with seeming redundancy. Until now I had persuaded myself that I was living life as a human being and not a human doing! However it was evident that without someone for me to help, or give counsel to, I was far from being a satisfied personality.

Returning from the neuropsychologist's appointment I was determined to be less black and white, to take a more rounded view of things and that seemed a daunting task. But it wasn't. It seems much work had been done over the period of hard labour experienced as depression and loneliness. During all this time, and throughout the tumultuous history recorded in these chapters, help had now appeared in the form of a local lady who was a friend and also a qualified therapist. This, along with several books, some of which are listed as further reading at the end of these pages, was of inestimable value. Once again the mystic saying had proved true: 'When the pupil is ready, the Master appears'.

After months of serious complaining to God, I knew I had entered yet a further new dimension of living. One major contributory step was making a simple decision to be happy or content in all

circumstances. Not to make myself happy by putting on a permanent smile and doing happiness. Just a decision to be and to wait for the results to appear. I had not long to wait before the joy began to rise from inside me, from my higher or deeper source. If the miseries started to return I just reiterated my intention to be content. I suppose it was a commitment to happiness. I want to stress that this was easy to do because I was not trying to make anything actually happen. At long last I was truly being, and not doing, but with a difference - the decision to be a certain way.

Looking back I can see I really wanted to be different, not only for my own sake but for those closest to me. That wanting had taken time to develop. I could not help but remember the reported words of Jesus, 'Wilt thou - or do you really want to - be made whole?'. He was not asking me, 'Do you want your situation altered? Do you want your life made easier?'. Many people I talk to want other people to change, then they feel their own lives will be happy; but being whole means coping with life just as it is. That needs thinking about.

My answer was a resounding 'Yes, I do!'. As I write it is early days, but the evidence of change is clear and my wife will attest the difference it is already making to our lives. Another phase for her to live through! Of course the phase will entail consolidation, not just the pressing of a magic solve-all button. There will be constant application ahead no doubt.

Perhaps a small 'for instance' (the salesman's essential words) will help to illustrate a little of what had happened to me. In justification let me say I had never despised small things and the words 'Faithful in little, faithful in much' had always appealed to me greatly.

'Would you like to go out for a drink, dear?' I enquired
'Yes' Eileen replied from upstairs, 'What shall I wear?'.
'Why don't you wear what you have got on?' I called back.

Now that is a first. For fifty-two years of married life I had been fussing about what Eileen wears or whether she had a strand of hair out of place. No wonder many of our friends think she deserves a sainthood for coping with my perfectionist ways. (I've always contended she looks pretty good on this treatment!)

It seems now as if I had been standing at a gate for years, holding it open for others to go in and enjoy the pastures of happiness; but I was unable to go in myself. I had spent my time worrying (but was not worried I was worrying, which apparently helped many). Now with no-one to minister to, I was forced to seek earnestly for my own contentment if I was not to end my days as a miserable old has-been and a family bore endlessly discussing my ailments. At last I felt really happy with my own lot. I even ceased complaining that life is not fair. Problems had not all suddenly disappeared, but I had now assumed a new perspective and trust I shall continue to do so.

So what has been the best thing to happen to me in recent years? The answer is clear if surprising: a stroke that put me in hospital for a month, stopped me in my tracks and caused my ever hectic life-style to dry up. Prospects for another London Marathon were clearly ruined as I was reduced to a long period of learning to walk again. In this I have been extremely fortunate and two years on my progress is so good you would hardly discern a limp - well not over short distances.

Undoubtedly one great spin-off has been my new independence from other people, with the ability to stand alone - something I have written and spoken about over the decades! Eileen has

been the 'wind beneath my wings' for many years and I don't know how I would have survived without her support; but now I trust I will be able to increasingly fly alongside her, operating in what I believe the experts call inter-dependence - or collaboration, to quote Scott Peck. A friend from Arizona recently referred to Eileen as my PR lady. I suppose that means others can observe how someone of her delightful disposition has stayed with such a vacillating toad for over half a century and conclude I can't be all that bad!

As I draw to a close I am reminded of the time we moved to this small cottage in a Kentish village some sixteen years ago. I felt my itinerant usefulness might be over and I was being put out to grass. I wanted to know if there was a purpose in such a move - you can see how unbearably full of purpose I have been. Needless to say I bombarded God with my enquiry as usual.

'You are going to have your mind renewed', seemed to be the insistent internal answer.

Having always been an emotional disaster I felt this area should have been a greater priority, but somehow even way back then I vaguely understood that wrong thinking was behind the painful emotions I so often suffered. Yet I did not know how to change. My emotive reactions to negative black and white thinking had for many years flashed around affecting various parts of my anatomy at the unstoppable speed of light. The link between wrong thinking and my feelings has caused emotional and physical havoc. It has also caused long term concern and distress to my family.

This stretch of life's journey has indeed been a very long haul and a painful one too. However I am now thankfully reaping some rewards in this life, not just the familiar 'pie in the sky when we die'. However, being a firm believer in the hereafter, I am fully convinced that the benefits will also be carried over. Well that's not such a bad deal is it, even if the restless nights and miserable days at times tempted me to believe I was on an endless conveyer belt with no end product? I am glad to know that is not true.

The truth is I have been in good hands all the time.

TRUTH . . . HAS NO FAVOURITES

I wouldn't be surprised if by now you have a big question or two.

How is this crazy old fellow doing today - is he continually flying smoothly at thirty thousand feet? The truthful answer is 'No'. There have been quite a few storms and considerable turbulence.

But that is OK. Where did we pick up the idea that the normal Christian life is a rose garden? Many of us were sold a kind of ideal insurance policy where all we needed to do was stick our hand up in a meeting, mouth the words 'Jesus is Lord', or maybe some other formula, and bingo! . . . we got a free ticket to heaven with a fully paid up protection and comfort guarantee on earth till we reached 'them pearly gates'.

Snatching a few bible texts here and there can easily back up this kind of gospel. Snatching a few texts from elsewhere can give a very different picture, but hopefully we have forsaken text snatching - if we were ever foolish enough to start it. I had years of such an approach with the ever-attendant dark angel of condemnation cruising above, ready to land on my head whenever I failed to live a blameless and thoroughly victorious life. There was always something I had done wrong, not done enough of, or done too much of. Too little prayer, too little study, too much doubt, too much worry. Things went well God got the credit, things went badly I got the blame. It was a no-win situation.

The 'name it and claim it' good news proclaimed by the Health, Wealth and Happiness Brigade, is in fact very bad news. It is not the truth. It is a lie. Such an approach is a good framework for triumphant high-powered meetings, but it can lead to endless heartache in real life when you can't drum up the 'faith' you are supposed to have to claim your promised inheritance successfully.

'He always causes us to triumph' are words attributed to the apostle Paul. Challenging aren't they? It is good to recall that this great hero escaped from Damascus during the dark of night hidden away in a basket. Perhaps he did gently lift the lid and continue to whisper, 'He always causes us to triumph'; I don't know. However he certainly did not expect the sort of easy ride I hear propounded today to folks suffering with cancer, deep depression, horrendous family distress or financial disaster.

One 'Christian' lady told me I had not brought my children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord and that is why my family was suffering so much illness. Another that I should have more faith. Well thanks very much. I was a polite Holy Joe in those days; now I think I would graciously invite these comforters to take a long walk on a short pier! Years later while I was standing in the dole line for benefit payment, I had to listen to the first lady's complaint as to how her husband had served as a shop manager for many years and had now been made redundant. It was so unfair! Since when has life been fair? Ask a butchered child. Why do we think believers are entitled to special treatment? If there is a magic button to cure all ills, why is it so difficult to find?

I do not write as one who has not seen miracles; I have. But a lifetime of experience has taught me that we cannot get God to pull all the right strings and order the world to our liking. He will not jump through our hoops. Now we live with enigma and paradox the Not Fair Syndrome has lost its grip on our lives.

There are storms in life. Severe storms. Some of them last a lifetime. Some things we shall never understand, but if we are weak enough to live in dependence upon the Higher Power we shall find we are strong enough to survive happily one day at a time. We shall even learn to smile through our storms, albeit faintly at times, and trace the rainbow through the rain.

Another helpful 'Christian' told me that we are not meant to survive, but to triumph gloriously. Wearing the shoes that some people have to wear continually, to survive is to triumph gloriously. Even so it is good to arrive at a place where we can increasingly say, 'I know how to be up, I know how to be down, to be appreciated or humiliated; I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content'. That is my paraphrase for what a fellow called Saul of Tarsus, or Saint Paul to us, is reported to have written two thousand years ago. And it is true. He learned it and so have I. Nothing 'out there' can harm us, only our reactions and silly wrong thinking, at which I have been an undoubted expert; but no more. I am walking, or gently jogging, alongside myself, observing and smiling as I unlearn all the absurd performance-orientation I was taught from the cradle.

Does that satisfactorily answer everyone's questions about my current performance? I shouldn't think so for a moment. But let me conclude by stating that I do not measure my performance now. Ever. Except when I forget! Then I finally smile again and go on living in the awareness of the moment, but without measuring it. My altimeter is out of action. I may be skipping on hills that are alive with the sound of music, or languishing in dungeon despair (to neatly accommodate Julie Andrews and John Bunyan in the same sentence), but it doesn't matter. Nothing does. All is well as I have abdicated my responsibility to succeed.

In recent months I have slipped effortlessly into the enjoyment of tangible silence and stillness with a sense of the spaciousness around me. An awareness of my inner life, my Being, has overcome a hitherto unruly mind. The ego-me has been subjected to a higher power. The mind-noise and constant background static is under control. There is peace in the presence of the Other. I suppose some would just call it meditation, but the effortless experience that has visited me does not need a label, unless it is perhaps . . . sane living!

Alongside my practical experience some books have helped me immensely. Most notable among these have been Awareness by Anthony de Mello and The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle. The understanding of these men has enabled me, and many to whom I have recommended their writings, to move into a new dimension of living. Once again it seems the timing was just right as we were ready to hear.

TRUTH . . . AN AFTERTHOUGHT

Having thought I had finished the manuscript for this book some time ago I then passed the seventy-five year milestone. Just as this event happened I heard a story about an elderly (seventy-five year old) man who had carried a passion for truth since he was very young. This is more than a mere coincidence I decided.

It seems when young this eager fellow set out in search of truth and travelled all his life across many lands and many seas. There was rugged terrain with high mountains and deep valleys to cross, so he experienced a great deal of hardship and suffering. One day, with three-quarters of a century in years behind him, he realised he had not found the truth he was looking for and decided to give up and return home. When he finally arrived back it was to discover that Truth had been patiently waiting for him all those years.

I wonder, did the man's journeying enable him to find the truth? I am sure that the answer is... 'No, but it helped him to recognise it!'

We really only discover what is there all the time. If you protest that surely we must grow and not remain static, I can only respond by saying that all progress is a growth in awareness. It is when we finally cease to struggle that we can enjoy the truth, or the reality of this moment. And this moment is all we can be certain we have. At the close of my story let me gently assert that 'We have all things that pertain to life and godliness'. They were within us all the time. Our light had become darkness, that is all. Now we can see, and we don't all have to wait until we are seventy-five years old to do so.

Many of us know the story of mankind eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thereby losing the ability to eat from the Tree of Life. Thankfully I have fallen out of the branches of the first tree and cannot sum up what is good and bad anymore. Some of the things that seemed extremely bad to me at one time, I can now see have given me the most lasting benefits. Even as I write, that old Stroke health-scare has reared it's head again (you'll notice I could not write 'ugly head'), but that is alright; everything is.

Is my marathon finished then? Or are there several more miles to travel? Who knows? Better still ... who cares? I can now 'Go carelessly', as my close friend Alan Halden so often signs off his letters to me. Now, two more years on from my seventy-five year milestone, with it's story of the life-long seeker after truth, I am putting a final touch to this manuscript as I wonder about a publisher. This touch concerns a much newer friend in our village who was entertaining me to some delicious cold white wine on a hot summer's day this year, as we basked luxuriously on his lawn.

After listening to many of my stories, Barry said earnestly, 'You've been searching all your life, Maurice'. I knew he was right. I'd been a seeker and a finder and a seeker still. But as he spoke I also somehow knew that now my search was over; just like the elderly man in the story I had come home. Yes, the search is over, but the discoveries will surely continue. They will continue with stillness and contentment in my heart, without the previous strain and stress, but with the attendant beauty of God's peace. I trust my remaining 'ordered life' will confess that truth. If so, Eileen will surely be pleased and her gracious ministrations accomplished.

As Barry and I sat together I could almost hear Alan creep up on us and whisper, 'Stay detached, Maurice!'. He loves a glass of good wine so I am not surprised he turned up in my imagination, and

his observation indicates that he too has learned a thing or two along the way. Well he is also seventy-seven years young after all. You may have noticed that Alan was kind enough to write some edifying words at the end of this little book. I am undeniably rich in friends and take this opportunity to thank them all for their generous contribution to my life. That is true especially of my family, who without exception have made me a grateful man.

* * * * *

It is several decades since I heard Bakt Singh say, 'Be still and know' (sneak another look at Chapter One). He was right, but it has taken me a very long time to realise and experience that.

I have finally slowed down inside and am pacing myself nicely; I even have time to smell the roses en route. The end of the marathon is in sight so I am going to allow myself to be deliberately paradoxical and snatch a text (why not?):

'He - She, The Infinite, Absolute, All In All, Our Father, Ground Of My Being, Transcendence, Immanence, Holy Spirit, God (the Great Other Dimension), Etc. ad infinitum - that began a good work in me will also complete it'.

First I believed that, then I knew it, and now I am constantly aware of it. I can just happily be who I am. The Truth, or reality, is right where we are on earth. Jesus is reported to have said, 'I am the Truth'. Thankfully I am consciously in him, he is in me, we - and the whole creation - are all a part of the same Creative Energy. One bundle of Life. Far too simple for many of us until the time was right. Until our understanding became a grace and not an attainment. If we have been slow, probably our problem was not that we knew too little, but that we knew too much.

TRUTH . . . IN A POEM BY A FRIEND

Don't hold me responsible for beliefs
That have probably changed by the time you
read these lines.
And above all,
Don't hold them up against me demanding that I
live by them, and
prove them.

I don't want to prove anything!
Merely to stand in dumb desire and rollicking awe;
Open-mouthed with wonder and delight
At life's flickering moments of
instant understanding,
surprise revelation and
flashes of simple beauty.

Don't you see that deepest beliefs are always the
most elusive
Like strange, exotic fish found in the darkest depths.
Like crystal waiting to catch the sun,
And like butterflies,
When you try to pin them down, you kill them.

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FURTHER READING

A SELECTION OF READING THAT HAS HELPED THE AUTHOR

TITLE

AUTHOR

The Ring of Truth	J. B. Phillips
Further Along the Road Less Travelled	M. Scott Peck
Counselling for Toads	Robert de Board
Self Help For Your Nerves	Claire Weekes
The Post-Evangelical	Dave Tomlinson
Friendship with God	Neale Donald Walsch
Quantum Healing	Deepak Chopra
Siddhartha	Deepak Chopra
Awareness	Anthony de Mello

ENLIGHTENED READING SINCE COMPLETING

'GLIMPSES OF TRUTH'

Passionate Presence	Catherine Ingram
Stillness Speaks	Eckhart Tolle
Still here	Ram Dass

AFTERWARD

This little book is humorous and honest. It is written with warmth and humanity about ordinary people in ordinary settings, helping us to find truth in unexpected places.

For Maurice Smith truth is a quest not a definition. He does not understand truth as a word game, but as the reality behind appearances. He is remembered, by all who hear him, as a storyteller and so follows a tradition which goes back beyond the written word and which is the precursor of all literature.

Like all good raconteurs his anecdotes are not just entertaining, although they are certainly that, but leave the reader with a sense of somehow touching the inner kernel of life, of reality . . . of Truth.

Alan Halden