

Connecting the Dots

Racism, Activism, & Creating a Life



TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

This lesson plan uses excerpts from the story “Connecting the Dots: Racism, Activism, & Creating a Life” by Michael McCarty to inspire conversation among students about the issues of racism, standing up for one’s beliefs, working for change in the world and our lives, and the power of stories. This story and lesson plan examine how racism affected one person’s life, and how the storyteller created his life out of the inspiration and stories of others, his own activism to change the world and himself, and even out of his own bad choices.

You may complete this lesson by having your students read or listen to the entire version of “Connecting the Dots: Racism, Activism, & Creating a Life” for homework. To listen to and/or read the story, have students go to www.racebridges.net/schools, click on “Lesson Plans” and then choose “Connecting the Dots.” There they will find audio and text excerpts of the story. Be sure that students have computer access to do this.

There is also a shorter version of this lesson plan that uses excerpts from the story and can be completed in one or two class periods.



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How To Use This Lesson

There are many ways to complete this lesson plan. The story is long: there are three audio sections of approximately 18 minutes each for a total of 54 minutes. If a teacher can devote three or four class sessions to this lesson plan, students could spend a day on each section, listening to the audio in class and then discussing the related questions. However, if a teacher can only spend a day or two on this lesson, students should listen to and/or read the stories for homework, coming prepared to start class with discussion **OR** the teacher should use the short version of this lesson plan.

So that teachers can decide how best to use this story and lesson plan, the lesson has been divided into five segments: 1. Introduction, 2. Excerpt #1 and Discussion Questions, 3. Excerpt #2 and Discussion Questions, 4. Excerpt #3 and Discussion Questions, and 5. Lesson Wrap Up.

These segments can be shortened or dropped: reading the sections takes less time than listening to them; students could read and/or listen to excerpts from each section and have the rest summarized by the teacher; students could take responsibility for reading and/or listening to one section and providing an oral or written summary for the class; and Story #1 used on its own would still provide a lot for a class to discuss and learn.

There are instructions provided for each segment; feel free to alter these to fit the way that you will use the lesson in your classroom.

Caution

There is reference to drug use in this story, particularly in Story #2. While the storyteller talks about how he eventually gave up drugs and devoted himself to being healthy and productive, a teacher might want to address the topic of drug use and abuse before beginning the lesson or to skip reading and listening to the sections of the story that pertain to drug use.

GRADE LEVEL: Grades 9-12.



PURPOSE

- To expose students to some of the history of the later Civil Rights movement and the particular experience of one African American in the twentieth century through a personal story.
- To address how racism affected one individual.
- To show how storytelling and examples of courage can change lives.
- To highlight how a person can respond positively to the challenges in his or her own life and overcome serious personal mistakes.

OUTCOMES

By the end of this lesson, each student will

- Be familiar with the conflicts and groups active during the later part of the Civil Rights Movement
- Understand how racism in America affected the life of one person.
- Understand how small choices made in our lives can shape our futures.
- Understand the power of storytelling and heroes.
- Respond to the issues and themes of the story.
- Relate their experience to the story.

MATERIALS

- Teacher Instructions and Lesson Plan
- Handout #1: Excerpts from “Connecting the Dots: Racism, Activism, & Creating a Life,” by Michael McCarty
- Handout #2: Discussion Questions

LESSON PLAN

Segments

1. Introduction and Summary of “Connecting the Dots”
2. Excerpt #1 and Discussion Questions
3. Excerpt #2 and Discussion Questions
4. Excerpt #3 and Discussion Questions
5. Lesson Wrap Up



LESSON PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduce your students to the story “Connecting the Dots.” Explain that they will have the chance to discuss each of the excerpts after listening to or reading them.

Today we’re going to begin listening to [and/or reading] excerpts from the story “Connecting the Dots” by Michael McCarty, an African-American storyteller who grew up in Chicago and is a storyteller today. In this story, McCarty describes his development from a boy who heard and read about the Civil Rights movement on television and in newspapers to becoming an activist in his own high school—St. Ignatius in Chicago—and eventually in the Black Panthers. McCarty’s political activism drew negative attention from the FBI, leading to difficulties in his professional and personal life. McCarty shares his struggles with drug dealing and use and how he broke out of both with a new focus on physical and spiritual health. All the various parts of McCarty’s life are bound together in this story by his faith in the power of heroic example, honest storytelling and sharing, and the importance of being open to all of our experiences.

McCarty uses his personal experiences to get at larger issues in American history and culture. He exposes how shocking it is for children to learn that someone might hate them just because of the color of their skin and that people and institutions in our society, such as police and schools, that are meant to protect us, actually might harm us. He embraces the power of reading to empower us with knowledge of our own and others’ histories and culture and the power of political involvement to change our society. Finally, McCarty shares a message of self-transformation based on storytelling, exploration, commitment, and finding one’s purpose.

We will listen to [and/or read] the three excerpts from this story. After each excerpt, you will have the chance to share your reactions and thoughts.



2. EXCERPT #1 & DISCUSSION

I'm going to give you a handout with an excerpt from "Connecting the Dots" and a handout with discussion questions. We will listen to the story aloud and you can follow along if you like. After we listen, I will ask you to jot down a few of your thoughts and then share them with a partner.

Hand out the excerpts and discussion questions; play excerpt #1. Give students five minutes to respond to the questions associated with the excerpt. Then ask them to pair up with someone to discuss their answers; each person should take 1-2 minutes to share his or her answer. Ask a few pairs to share their answers with the class.

3. EXCERPT #2 & DISCUSSION

Play excerpt #2. Give students five minutes to answer the questions associated with the excerpt. Then ask them to pair up with someone to discuss their answers; each person should take 1-2 minutes to share his or her answer. Ask a few pairs to share their answers with the class.

4. EXCERPT #3 & DISCUSSION

Play excerpt #3. Ask pairs to join another pair to make a group of four. You may need to have one group of six if there is not an even number of pairs. Ask students to identify a time keeper for this activity to so that they finish within the time allotted.

5. CLASS DISCUSSION & WRAP UP

Call students back together and have each group share one major concept, impression, or feeling that they will take away from the story and their discussion. Students may share their own personal experiences. Consider asking students to do some writing on this topic for homework or extending the lesson with one of the ideas below.



Lesson Extension Ideas

1. Have students learn the history of the later part of the Civil Rights Movement, The Black Panthers, and Fred Hampton, Bobby Seale, and Huey P. Newton. Consider how civil rights groups were often described as terrorists by the government. Study the conflict between agitating for change and keeping the peace. Assign different groups of students to research different parts of the story and bring it all together in a class presentation.
2. Read one or more chapters from *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* or *Why Are All the Black Kids sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* and hold further discussion or have students write book reviews or position papers about what they read. Both books contain chapters that stand alone if you don't have time to read the whole book.
3. Have students study the way that McCarty shapes his story around the themes of "journey," including both the good and the bad in his story, weaving together his various experiences to explain who he is today. Have students follow this model to write their own life stories up to this point.
4. Buy a copy of the curriculum *Kaleidoscope: Valuing Difference and Creating Inclusion* (see resource list) and teach diversity in a more in-depth way.
5. Watch one of the videos listed in the resource list and discuss it in class.



Resources

Books

- Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Philadelphia, New Society, 1996. Written by a white man and primarily for a white audience but useful for people of all backgrounds.
- Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Loewen critiques the way that history has been taught in American classrooms, focusing on its bland, Eurocentric bias. He urges educators to focus on real, diverse stories that make up our history. Eye opening for teachers and students alike.
- O'Halloran, Susan. *Kaleidoscope: Valuing Difference & Creating Inclusion*. Available at www.susanohalloran.com. A two-level curriculum for schools about diversity, race and dealing with difference. O'Halloran approaches diversity, race, and racism in a way that makes an often intimidating subject approachable and even fun. O'Halloran avoids blame and empowers students to uncover their own biases and to recognize institutional racism and to work for both personal and societal change.
- Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Written by a professor of psychology for a diverse audience. Focuses specifically on race, racism, and the construction of racial identity among adolescents.

Videos

- Berhaag, Bertram (Producer/Director). *The Complete Blue Eyed*. Available at www.newsreel.org. This edition contains multiple versions of the "blue-eyed/brown-eyed" experiment that demonstrates how swiftly prejudice affects people. Originally used with grade school students, this exercise has been used with adults with the same results. This edition comes with a facilitator's guide. 93 minutes total; can be watched in shorter segments.



Gray, Mike and Howard Alk. *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. Chicago: Facets, 2007. This film was begun during Hampton's life to document his political work; Hampton was killed before the film was finished. The film ends as an exploration of Hampton's murder. 88 minutes.

Lucasiewicz, M. (Producer). *True Colors*. Northbrook, IL: MTI Film & Video, 1991. An ABC video with Diane Sawyer that follows two discrimination testers, one black and one white, as they look for jobs and housing and try to buy a car. A good look at institutional racism. 19 minutes.

Reid, F. (Producer/Director). *Skin Deep: College Students Confront Racism*. San Francisco, CA: Resolution/California Newsreel, 1995. Available at www.newsreel.org. Examines a multi-racial group of students discussing race and racism; demonstrates the possibility of changing attitudes through dialogue. 53 minutes.

Valadez, John (Director). *Passin' It On: The Black Panthers' Search for Justice*. Documrama, 2006. Documentary about Dhoruba Bin Wahad, born Richard Moore, a Black Panther prisoned for 19 years for allegedly shooting two white policemen. He was eventually exonerated; this is his story. 102 minutes.

Organizations

Teaching Tolerance. www.teachingtolerance.org. Started by the Southern Poverty Law Center, it provides teachers with free educational materials that promote respect for differences and appreciation of diversity in the classroom and beyond.

Facing History and Ourselves. <http://www.facinghistory.org>. Provides conferences and free resources and lesson plans for teachers. Focuses on issues of anti-Semitism, racism, building inclusive communities, and so on. Excellent historical resources.



Notes to Teachers:

The **bolded** text can be read out aloud and followed word for word; however, you may want to read over the material a few times so that you are comfortable putting these ideas into your own words, in the way in which you normally talk to your students.

If you would like to read other stories written by Michael McCarty or engage him to perform at your school, go to <http://www.havemouthwillrunit.com>.





Handout #2: Discussion Questions

Directions

After listening to each excerpt, take a few minutes to read the following questions and write down your reactions. You may not have time to address all the questions; focus on those that grab your attention. Then share your answers with a partner.

Excerpt #1

Michael describes his mother's influence on his life: she told him lots of stories, convinced him that reading was the key to all else, and taught him that it was important to stand up for what he believed in. Michael had the opportunity to use these lessons, as he describes disturbing incidents of racism that he experienced while a child and teenager; some of these experiences were with authority figures, such as school administrators and police officers. These experiences, and the Civil Rights Movement around him, leads him to join the Black Panthers and to become an activist, decisions which result eventually in his expulsion from high school.

1. How do you think the advice and wisdom of Michael's mother influenced him? Do you agree with her advice? How is reading about culture, politics, and history important for you? When have you or would you stand up for something you believe in?
2. What role did experience play in developing Michael's political activism?
3. Michael tells the story of riding bikes with friends through a neighborhood where white people from a local Little League game chased them off, throwing bricks and stones and threatening them with bats. He then says "I don't think I ever told my parents about this happening." Why might a 12-year-old boy not share such a scary incident with his family?



4. Michael and his friends are jumped by a gang when they go to a party on the South Side of Chicago and are badly injured; Michael receives little help from the white police officers he encounters. How did you feel when you read this part of the story? How does this fit with your own experience of / impression of the police? How does this experience “radicalize” Michael?
5. Why was reading so important in the Black Panther Party? How might reading and education be a “political act” today? For what groups do think it is very important to read and know about their history, culture, and politics today? Why?
6. Michael and his friends in the Black Students Organization make some demands at his high school that are rejected by the school administration. What do you think of their demands and their decision to hold a walkout? Has anything like this happened at your school or community? What political issues get you and your friends energized? For what would you risk getting kicked out of school?



Excerpt #2

After the walkout, Michael and his friend Gerry were kicked out of school, and Michael becomes a full-time activist with the Black Panther Party. Michael describes the work of the Black Panthers and the government attacks on them, which eventually led to the decline of the Black Panthers. This, too, leads to Michael moving in another direction, getting married and finding a job. But Michael finds that his past follows him as the FBI tries to get him to work as an informer and then sabotages his life when he refuses to do so. This leads to Michael joining the Army and being sent to Korea where he develops an interest and knowledge in Asian martial arts and healing practices. After he returns from Korea, Michael gets involved in drug dealing and use; he eventually realizes that he is endangering his life and makes the decision to get healthy, which leads to his study of acupuncture and decision to travel the world.

1. How do you make sense of the information in this excerpt? Was there anything that surprised you?
2. Why did some people, including the government, find the Black Panther Party threatening? Are there any political or social groups working in similar ways in communities today?
3. Did you know the story of Fred Hampton? What more would you like to know?
4. How do you understand the actions of the black police officer, “Gloves” Davis, known for his brutal treatment of other black people?
5. Do you think there is a relationship between Michael’s experience of racism and of political activism and his eventual use of drugs? Why or why not?
6. How does learning about other cultures—this time Asian—impact Michael?
7. What do you think will happen next in Michael’s story?

Excerpt #3:

For this final excerpt you and your conversation partner should join with another pair to discuss any of the following questions that interest you. Assign one of you as a timekeeper so that you finish in the time allowed.

Michael begins his world travels and is drawn to India to meet the guru Sai Baba, which leads him to go home to get his affairs in order, earn some money and get out of the drug business for good. Michael describes a number of coincidences after that, which lead him to more travel in India, then to Los Angeles and finally into becoming a professional storyteller. He learns that he has changed people's lives through his activism and storytelling, leading him to end his story by affirming that all that has happened in his life has made him who he is today.

1. Michael's life changes greatly during this part of the story. What factors led to those changes? How were people, travel, and coincidence important?
2. What all led to Michael's decision to become a storyteller? How might decision relate to the influence of his mother? What obstacles did he face? What "breaks" did he receive?
3. Michael discovers that he has affected people whom he didn't know. How did Michael affect them? How might his example influence your own life?
4. Michael embraces all that has happened in his life: the good and the bad and the coincidences. He acknowledges the "smart" and the "stupid" things he's done, but values it all because they all make him who he is today. What do you think about that philosophy? Is there anything in Michael's story that you would remove if you could? Is there anything you would add?
5. In what ways does this story connect to your own life? What learning will you take away from this story?



STORYTELLING TRANSCRIPT

Story #1:

My mother thought she had gas.

My mother was in her forties. Her stomach started to bloat. She went to the doctor, thinking she had gas. But no, she had me.

My father was fifty years old and he was rather proud. My mother, however, it was a totally different thing.

But my mother was my first storyteller. As long as I can remember, and I can remember 'til I was two years old, my mother told me stories. She read me stories. She told me stories about growing up in Barbados.

One of the favorite stories my mother would tell me is about reading, and how much she loved to read. My mother would read until her mother came and told her she had to turn out the light and go to bed. Then my mother, after her mother had left the room, would go to the window and read by the gas streetlight. That's how much she loved reading.

Well, growing up, my mother taught me all kinds of lessons. I would hang out with her in the kitchen. She would tell me how important it was for you to stand up for what you believed in. How important it was for you to fight for the things that were right. If you saw something wrong, how you had an obligation to do something about that.



As I was growing up in the fifties and the sixties on the west side of Chicago, the Civil Rights Movement was going on. My mother, being an avid reader, read the newspaper. And I read the newspaper, so I was aware of all these things that were going on. Interestingly enough, in life even though things are going on all around you, and you have to have an awareness of them, it's often not until you have something personal happen to you that makes you aware of what's going on. At the same time, sometimes things go on and they are just the norm and you accept them.

For instance, when I was growing up on the west side of Chicago, I was a boy scout about 11-12 years old. A group of us, four of us, decided we wanted to get our cycling merit badges. So we were going to ride our bikes from 14th & Pulaski to Crestwood, Illinois, going south on Pulaski 'til about 150th–160th, something like that. And we figured that would give us the necessary mileage to get our cycling merit badge.

So early on a Saturday morning, the four of us set out. And we rode and raced, and rode and raced. And we had a great time. We rode out to Cresswood, Illinois – maybe a little bit beyond. And then we turned around to come back.

As we were coming back, there was a water fountain across the street from a stadium where a little league game was going on. One by one, we stopped at this water fountain to guzzle up all the water we could. I was the last one. And as each one drank, he would ride off, and the next one would drink and ride off, and so on until it was me. And so when it was my turn, I was kind of trying to drink all the water in the world.

And as I'm slurping down this water, all of sudden I become aware that my friends are yelling and waving their hands, and yelling and pointing. And I look at them and I see that they're pointing, and I turn.

That stadium where the little league game had been going on had emptied. The parents had emptied the stands. The little league players had emptied the field, and they were all running after us.

Men, women, and children – carrying baseball bats and sticks and balls and bricks and rocks. And I still have this image of this woman, who couldn't have been more than about 30 years old – this white woman with glasses. Running and yelling and cursing at me. Well, seeing this, I rode my butt off!



I quickly caught up with my friends and passed them, and we rode and rode and rode until we were safe. And then we laughed about it, and went on about our day.

Now the interesting thing is, I don't think I ever told my parents about this happening because this was just the way things were.

I went on to high school. Now I'd always gone to private schools, Catholic schools on the west side of Chicago. I went to St. Finbar Elementary. And then for high school, I went to St. Ignatius College Preparatory.

Now my dream in life, from the time I had been in about fourth or fifth grade, was to be a physicist and an astronaut. That's what I wanted to be when I grew up. Now, my mother had always told me that I could be anything I wanted to be. She said, "If you can read, you can do anything." And she never placed any limitations on what I wanted to be in my life.

So I enrolled in St. Ignatius, a very prestigious college preparatory, as I mentioned. And, at the time, 95% of the population of St. Ignatius was white. And that 5% was black, Latino, Asian, and anything else. That was my first experience being in a predominantly white school environment, and there were a lot of adjustments to make – for me and also my white classmates.

Well, the black students all hung together and we got to know each other. One of my best friends, Gerry Tyler, was also a student there. We had gone to St. Finbar together, and life went on. We are learning about how to exist in this place and deal with school.

It had to be my sophomore year. Me and one of my black classmates, John Dilworth, went to a party on the south side of Chicago, somewhere near Dunbar High School—what was then South Park Boulevard, now King Drive. We went to a party at this high rise, a project-type high rise, over near Dunbar.

As we walked into the building, we walked past this group of guys. Well, turns out they were a gang. We will find that out in a minute.

We walked into the building, we turned the corner where we thought the elevator was, and there was a dead end. We turned around to go back, and there was this group. And they turned out to be the Dell Vikings, a gang on the south side of Chicago.

There were about 15, maybe 20, of them.



They didn't appreciate us being in their neighborhood, and they proceeded to kick our butts. They beat our butts until they got tired.

Now at some point, the group that was kicking my butt beat me out into the street. I guess they wanted some fresh air.

So they kicked our butts, literally, 'til they were tired.

And one by one, they walked away.

The last guy that remained—I'm face-down on the ground—he grabs me by my collar, pulls out a gun, puts the gun to my head, says something to the effect of, "I'm going to blow you away, nigger!" and pulls the trigger.

And just as he pulls the trigger, this girl – I don't know if she was his girlfriend or what – to my mind, she was an angel.

She grabbed his hand, and the bullet didn't go through my head. "Don't do it, Johnny! You'll get in trouble!" she says, or something like that.

So he pistol-whipped me. Now given the option at the time—a bullet in the head, getting pistol-whipped—pistol-whipped was okay.

So he hit me, and hit me, and hit me in the head with the gun, and then tells me to run or he will shoot me. Well, I couldn't even stand up, so I crawled real fast.

Now, I crawled over to South Park Boulevard.

Now, my friend is still back in the building. I don't know what's happened to him.

When I get over to South Park, there's a police car stopped at a light.

Now at this point, I'm bleeding and I'm starting to swell up. I can barely stand up. I stagger over to the police car. White officer sitting in the car. I stagger up to him. I say, "Officer!" And I try to tell him what happened. And after listening to me, he looks at me and says, "So?"

Now this ain't the way it's supposed to happen. This is not the way it would happen on *Leave it to Beaver* or *Ozzie and Harriet*, or any of those programs from the fifties and sixties. They'd call all cars and what have you. Serve and protect.

Well, he's supposed to help me, so I got in his car because that's what's supposed to happen. He's supposed to help me.

I say, "You've got to help my friend!"

So he takes me around to the building, pulls up in front of the building, and tells me to get out of the car and go into the building by myself and find my friend.

Meanwhile, the members of this gang are outside, and they see me in the police car. They're walking right to the police car, as if to come and get me out and finish what they started.

I said, "Look, take me away from here! Take me to the police station, arrest me or something!"

Well, there was a police station only a block or two away. He drops me off at the police station and then goes about his business.

Well, I'm thinking this is an aberration. This is a fluke. In the police station, I'm going to get some help.

I walk into the police station. I don't even get a chance to say anything to the officers 'cause now, at this point, I'm really swollen up. My face, my head, blood everywhere.

And the white police officers just start laughing. In fact, they call out police officers from the back to let them see and be entertained by me.

So I don't even bother.

I go to the pay phone, and I call my parents. Well, my father comes. And when my father comes, the police all act, "Oh...oh...oh...we'll find out what's going on." They act all concerned.

My friend, John Dilworth, had called his mother. He had gotten into somebody's apartment who had let him use their phone. His mother had come and got him, and we all met up there at the police station.

We were pretty banged up, so they took us to the hospital.

Now, in my storytelling life, I like to say I tell stories about the brilliant and absolutely stupid things that I've done in my life. Well, this is one of the stupid things I did.

We got to the hospital.

Now my friend, John, had very little hair on his head. And because he had been beaten and was bleeding, and what have you, they had to shave what little hair on his head off so they could give him stitches.

Now I had been pistol-whipped and beaten, and I had a lot of gashes in my head, and was bleeding – and I had a 'fro. And when I saw what they had done to John, and when they turned to me and said, "Well how 'bout you? You look –"

I said, "No, I'm fine. No, no. I'm okay." 'Cause I wasn't letting them shave my 'fro.

So when my father took me home, my mother was all distraught and very, very upset.

And after getting over that, I quietly went into the washroom, grabbed a towel and a bottle of alcohol, poured the alcohol on the towel, and then put it on my head.

That had to be one of the dumbest things that I've ever done in my life! It hurt worse than the beating.

This had been my wake-up call. I mean, for years I had been reading about racism and especially police apathy and racism, and now I'd had my own personal experience of it.

After that, I became an activist.

I started reading. This was a time when black history was coming to the fore. And so I'm reading about black history and culture. I joined a youth wing of the NAACP, and I became an activist.



This was also the time when across the country, black students in high schools and colleges were starting black student organizations. Black students were coming together to learn about our history and our culture, and to share what we learned.

So at St. Ignatius, myself and my buddy, Gerry Tyler, we started this black student organization. Like I said, I was in the youth wing of the NAACP, and we were trying to deal with making people aware of race and what was going on in the world.

One of the things we did at St. Ignatius, after Gerry and myself and some other members of our black student organization and even a couple of white students who were interested, we started a panel to discuss race.

And this panel would go to other Catholic high schools in the Chicago area, and we would sit up on the stage and we would talk, and I would share stories because that was my way of communicating. As I learned information, I'd share these stories and have a discussion.

Now at one of these high schools, it was a girls' high school, perhaps in the city, perhaps in a nearby suburb—I don't really remember. During our Q & A, this white girl raised her hand to ask a question. She was, maybe, a sophomore or junior – I don't really remember. We'd been getting all kinds of questions about how to deal with this aspect of race and that aspect of race.

And this girl raised her hand and asked, "How is it that you all, you blacks, deal with having your tails under your clothing?"

How do you answer something like that? I don't remember, I think we were all stunned to hear this stereotype actually being expressed by someone who presumably had some intelligence.

I went on and got more and more involved in what was going on. In 1966 in Oakland, California, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale started the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, and in 1968 that organization came to Chicago. Well, when it came to Chicago—I'd been reading about this organization—they had a headquarters at 2350 West Madison at Madison and Western on the West Side of Chicago. So, I showed up, starting attending some of the political education classes, and one of the first things when you got there is that you had to read. They gave you a reading list. You had to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, you had to read *Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Fanon. There was a whole list

of things you had to read because you had to know about history, and culture, and politics. That was one of the first things you had to do. So I became a member of this organization, and I became a member of the education cadre. We taught those political education classes.

Meanwhile back at school, as black students were wont to do in these black student organizations, we had a list of demands. We wanted Black Studies in the school so that people could actually learn about what was really black history. We wanted outreach to the black community because St. Ignatius was a school that was in the black community but had no real involvement with it. We wanted more minorities in the school. Things like this. So we presented our list of demands to St. Ignatius. I remember they looked at it and said, “Ha!” and “Get out of here.”

So we decided to have a walk out. This walk out was scheduled for February 1969. The morning of our walkout, word had gotten out. Some of the black students didn’t show up for school that day. The assistant principal made an announcement before our walkout that there was this rumor of a walkout, you shouldn’t do it, things like that. Well, we had our walkout. We had our walkout, and there were white students who walked out in sympathy for what we had demanded. And after our walkout, after we were interviewed by the press—because this was a big “to do”; St. Ignatius is a school where judges and politicians send their kids—so this was a big “to do.” After that walkout, I didn’t go back to school that day, I went on to the Black Panther Party Office, and showed up at home, must have been after 10 o’clock or so, the news was on. When I arrived home, my mother had just learned about the walkout from watching the news. My brother and sister were there trying to console her because she knew instinctively that there would be consequences, that more than likely I would be kicked out of school. I was to be the first one to go to college in my family. I had scholarships to Notre Dame, to University of Illinois at Champaign, and, like I said, I was going to be a physicist. When I came in feeling all “Mm!”—tough. Unfortunately, my father was not home—he worked the graveyard shift—had my father been home, I would not be telling you this story right now, more than likely. But my brother decided to fill in for my father, so after I had gone to my room, my brother burst into the room ready to kick my butt. And I started talking, and I told him why I was doing what I had been doing. Indeed, me and Gerry, we were kicked out of school, and that became my full-time immersion as an activist and a member of the Black Panther Party.



Story #2:

So in February of 1969, I had been kicked out of St. Ignatius just a few months before graduation and now was a full-time member of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. Let me tell you a little bit about what I did in the Black Panther Party.

One of the things that we had to do, besides the political education classes I've already mentioned, we sold the Black Panther newspaper and we were involved in the breakfast for children program. That was one of the community service programs that the party started. And the idea was that black kids were going to school hungry. So we started this program in various areas of Chicago and around the country where kids would be able to go and get a full breakfast – a hot breakfast. Eggs, bacon, grits, oatmeal, toast, things like that. Orange juice and milk.

And interestingly enough, J. Edgar Hoover – who was the director of the FBI – said that the most dangerous thing that the Black Panther Party did was feed those hungry children, because we were doing something that the government was not. And, subsequently, programs like that were started by the government.

Well, there were other things that we did. We eventually had free medical clinics. We had programs to take people to visit their relatives, who were in prison, who didn't have automobiles. We had a bus, and we would pick them up and take them to visit. A variety of community service programs were going on.

Now in 1969, J. Edgar Hoover essentially had declared war on the Black Panther Party. And so there were lots of confrontations that were going on.

In December of 1969, Fred Hampton – who was the chairman of the Illinois chapter – was assassinated by the Chicago police in conjunction with the FBI. Fred Hampton was the heart and soul of the Black Panther Party in Chicago. He was a dynamic young man. He was only 21 years old when he was assassinated. And actually, they were so intent on killing Fred that they, in a manner of speaking, killed him twice.

The head of security of our chapter was an FBI plant—an FBI agent. And the night before Fred was shot and killed, he had actually poisoned him. He had given him a lethal dose of Secenal. When an autopsy was done, the conducting the autopsy said that he would have died had he been shot or not.



Now when that raid took place the morning of December 4, 1969, at the end of that raid where several people were wounded, Fred and Mark Clark had been killed.

Well, Fred was not dead when the raid concluded. One of the police officers went into the bed where Fred had been sleeping – he never woke up during the raid – and said, “He’s still alive!” And “Gloves” Davis, a black policeman known for brutalizing black people especially on the west and south sides of Chicago, went into the room and put two bullets into Fred’s head and said, “He’s dead now!”

The murder of Fred had been well-planned and was done with a purpose. He was the heart and soul of that chapter, and with his death, the chapter started to demise.

One of the things that Fred had initiated in Chicago was the original Rainbow Coalition. He organized alliances with the Young Lords, which had been a Puerto Rican street gang headed by Cha Cha Jimenez.

We also had alliances with the Young Patriots, poor Appalachian whites in the uptown area of Chicago.

And there were alliances with SDS around the country with, uh, Mexican and Native American groups.

Because the idea was that the struggle that we were talking about was not a struggle of black and white, it was a struggle of those who had and those who did not have. It transcended race.

As I mentioned, with Fred’s murder, the party went into decline. And later on in 1970, some of us started leaving.

I left in April of 1970. I’d gotten married. My wife had been a member of the party also, and we were expecting our daughter, Carla. So I left – took a job at the post office.

In December of 1970 while working at the post office in downtown Chicago, my supervisor told me that I had to report to the ninth floor. Now, the ninth floor was not some place where you wanted to go.

It was spoken in hushed terms – “*the ninth floor.*”



And when I arrived there, there were two FBI agents. Basically, they told me they wanted me to re-join the Black Panther Party and be an informer.

Hmmph.

Well, I told them what they could do with that idea.

And they said to me, “You have two options. You can work for us, or you won’t work.”

Well, I wasn’t working for them.

A few months later, I got a document from the government. If you work for the post office or some government agency, you sign a paper saying that I’d been involved in no organization that advocates the armed overthrow of the government. And they were going to prosecute me as a government employee because I had been in the Black Panther Party.

So I had to leave that job.

This document that they had sent me noted conversations I had had with people in bookstores, noted about my having gotten kicked out of St. Ignatius for having led that walk-out, talked about how many guns I owned, how many rounds of ammunition I’d bought in the previous year, and things of that nature.

So I left.

I would go and apply for other jobs. My applications would disappear.

Over the next year, all kinds of things would happen to me.

Over the next two years, I would have three different apartments broken into eight times.

At some point, a woman was calling my wife like she was my girlfriend.

On and on this went. My life was just being torn apart.

The last break-in took place the day before Thanksgiving in November of 1972. I came home to my apartment, and everything of value was gone.



Well, now I had a decision to make. It seemed that they were bent on destroying me and my life, so I thought – what can I do? How can I deal with this situation? So I decided to join the army.

You might say, you did what?! And that’s what a lot of my friends said. But I figured if they were going to watch me, I was going to go someplace where they could watch me. And I was going to play soldier, and get them off my back.

So December 8, 1972, I went to Fort Polk, Louisiana and started basic training.

My first day in basic, everybody else was either nervous or trying to act tough. And I was sitting there with a smile on my face.

A sergeant came up to me and said, “Young man, you don’t seem to be bothered by any of this.”

I said, “Sarge, it’s just another day.”

He said, “I’m going to make you platoon guy.” They told me that my job was to play sergeant. My job was to make up duty roster and to give orders. And they told me that they would punish me if I did any of the work myself.

Heh. Well I know how to tell people what to do.

After basic training, I got a promotion. And then I went to advanced individual training, also at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

One day, I was walking past my basic unit and one of the permanent duty guys came up to me and said, “Mike! The government guys have been around here! They’ve been asking everybody questions about you!”

I said, “Okay, thank you.” I knew that this was going to happen.

A day or two later at my AIT unit, the first sergeant came up to me and said, “Mike! There’s these government guys – they want to talk to you. They say that you were in the Black Panther Party and things like that.”

And I said, “Yeah, that’s true.”



So I went to talk to these guys. And I told them a story. I told them that I have seen the errors of my ways, and I was here to serve my country. And when I got through talking, I had one of these FBI agents in tears.

And I got them off my back.

And in May of 1973, I went to South Korea to **Sonyoree** for my first duty station. One of the reasons I had gone to Korea was to study Tae-Kwan-Do – to study martial arts. So as soon as I got to my duty station, I started Tae-Kwan-Do classes.

After a few months, General Henry E. Emerson was assigned to command the division. There had been all kinds of problems going on with division – racial strife between blacks, between whites, between the Katusas, the Koreans assigned to the U.S. Army. And so he instituted this policy of all kinds of activities. Among them – Tae-Kwan-Do tournaments.

Units would fight against each other. I was representing my unit.

Well, the colonel of my battalion decided whatever the general liked, he loved. And he decided he wanted to win this competition. So he told me and another guy, “All I want you all to do is train and to win this tournament.”

And so, from that time on, that became my duty in the military – fighting in Tae-Kwan-Do tournaments and instructing.

Well, I won. And with that winning came all kinds of great connections and promotions, and a great duty.

One day, I had been fighting in a tournament. I had sprained my wrist. There was a Korean guy who was a friend who worked in the bookstore on the base. He was also an acupuncturist. I went by the bookstore after this tournament with my wrist all wrapped up, and he saw that I was in pain. He said, “Let me give you an acupuncture treatment.”

I said, “Sure.” I was open to it.

Well, he gave me a treatment and I watched the swelling in my wrist just go zzzzzzzzzzz...pop! And was gone.



I said, “Oh...that’s intriguing.”

So the rest of the time that I was in Korea, I would get treatments from time to time whenever I had pains or sprains or things like that.

So I got out of the service December of 1975. I decided to go back to school. Went back to the University of Illinois where I’d taken some classes before I’d joined the service and was a math major.

Now while I was in school, I started dealing.

First I started dealing marijuana, then other things. Eventually marijuana, cocaine, and things like that. And in 1979, I was introduced to what was then called free-basing, now called crack.

It’s often said, “Be careful what you wish for, ‘cause you might just get it.” And I can remember in 1979, I was wishing for a new kind of high – something that would give me an intense rush.

And then one day, this buddy of mine came by. He said, “Mike, I’ve got something for you to try.” And that was my first introduction to free-base.

Now that happened in August of 1979. And to this day, I still remember that first hit – that first rush. That would be where I learned the true meaning of addiction.

Free-basing began to take over my life.

At that point in my life, I was contemplating getting out of the drug business. I had a beautiful girlfriend who I was going to ask to marry me. I started school at DeVry to be an electrical engineer.

But then, the pipe took over my life. From that point on, nothing else mattered.

Richard Pryor did this great routine about the pipe. Where it just was in control, and that’s just what it was like.

After a while, the girlfriend – I ignored. I had been working as a technician for GTE – I left the job. I stopped going to school.



The only thing that mattered was that pipe.

I lived for that pipe.

And I can remember thinking one time when I was just rushing, and my heart was thumping, and I thought that I might die. And my only thought was, “I hope that my heart slows down enough so I can get in one more hit before I die, and go out on the rush.”

That’s how all-consuming that was.

That was from August of ’78 ‘til August of ’79. And in August of ’79, I was going to get the chemicals at this head shop over in Old Town in Chicago – on the north side of Chicago. This guy noticed I was buying his chemicals he said, “Ahh...you going to cook something up?”

I said, “Yeah.”

He said, “I’ve got a way that will knock your socks off.”

And I thought, “Moi? Knock off my socks?” I was pulling half a gram at a hit.

He said, “Man, come on by later, and I’ll show you.”

So I went by later, took three grams of Peruvian Flake—P-Funk—and I watched him cook this up, and I was sitting on a stool, and he gave me the pipe, and he said, “Check it out.” And I started taking a hit. Now they say in drugs that you are always chasing that first hit, that first intense rush. Well, I chased it, I caught, and it grabbed a hold of me. And for the first time, I got scared. Instead of taking a full hit, like I used to, all of the sudden, I’m like “Hoo-hoo-hoo,” trying to blow this stuff out. I sat on that stool for what seemed like forever but was probably at least an hour, if not two. Finally, I was able to move to another position on a couch, and then I left, and this guy made me take some of my cocaine.

The next day, I tried to hit the pipe again, but I couldn’t do it like I had before. And then it was like after a year I woke up. I had gone through all my savings. I had put aside bonds for my daughter’s education; I had smoked all that up. Whereas before I was very good

with math and numbers, simple addition was a challenge. And I woke up. And I thought, “Oh my God, what have I done? And what am I going to do?” And it was so desperate that I thought that, “Maybe I’ll go and join the Army again.” And I went downtown where there were a lot of recruiting bases—the one that I had gone to when I had joined the Army. And I walked up and I put my hand on the door about to go in, and I thought, “No, let me think about it.” I went and sat down on the curb and decided, “No, I’m not doing that again.”

I decided it was time to change my life and that’s when I became a health nut. I started reading Dick Gregory’s book about health and nutrition and reading all of these things, and I started changing my life. Now, I was still involved in drugs. I was still smoking marijuana; I was still occasionally tooting cocaine, but I was through with the pipe. But I started making all these changes. Somewhere in the midst of that—this is ‘79, early ‘80—an acupuncture school opened up on the North Side of Chicago: the Northwest Center for the Study of Oriental Medicine. They offered a shiatsu class, which is acupressure massage. So, I decided to take one of these classes, and I decided I wanted to study acupuncture. I’d experienced it when I was in the service and I wanted to see how it worked. So, I became a health nut, I started studying oriental medicine. And while I was studying oriental medicine, I found that acupuncture was also used to help detox people from drugs, and one of my principle instructors—Paul Zmiewski—had studied at this clinic in New York. So, I said, I want to go and study too. And I went there and started studying acupuncture to help detox people from drugs, and that would eventually become one of my specialties. Now, my specialty is helping detox people from drugs, and at this point in time I am still a drug dealer; I guess you might call that job security.

Well, in 1981 the director of the clinic, Dr. Michael Smith, and one of the other therapists were going to Sri Lanka for an acupuncture conference, and I’d been asked to come New York to work in the clinic while they were gone. I did that. And when they came back, they told me about this clinic in Sri Lanka. And it awakened an interest. I wanted to go to this clinic, I also wanted to go to China. There were all these places I wanted to go, and I started putting together this trip. In my mind, I was going to travel around the world. I was going to be gone for maybe a year, and I was going to study, and I was going to goof off. I was going to visit the spiritual healing, drug, and sex capitals of the world. Well that trip, that trip that I would take in 1982 would change my life.



Story #3:

So on April 1, 1982, I set off on a trip around the world. I was to visit about a dozen countries, and my intention had been to travel for about a year. Things would change that.

So, I set off. My first stop was San Francisco – visited a friend of mine, David Heller, who I had gone to acupuncture school with. He gave me a book called *Autobiography of a Yogi*. He said, “You’re going to India, you’ve got to read this book.”

So I set off on my trips, I’d read this book, and I arrived in Sri Lanka in around July. And I spent a month there taking this acupuncture course and another couple of weeks touring around Sri Lanka with a girlfriend who had come to visit me.

While I was in Sri Lanka, I met this Swedish woman named Bim Vreeswijk. And I went by her room one day, and she had a picture of this Indian holy man named Sai Baba. And she told me some stories about him. He did miracles and things like that. So I figured – I’m going to India, I’ll check this dude out.

So I arrived in India. I went to go check out this holy man Sai Baba, and ended up having my life turned totally upside-down, inside-out, and all-around. I met him. He knew all about me. He talked to me about things in my life that I’d never talked to anybody about. And from that point on, my life truly changed.

At this point, I’d been in—I was still into the drug thing, and that would eventually fall away, as would a bunch of things.

So I get back home and I start making changes in my life. I’m still in the drug business at first. And I remember talking to one of my friends, Chester, about all the changes I’d made in my life. And he said, “You know, Mike, people always talk about how they’re going to change. But they keep doing the same old things.”

Well, I had a lot of changes to make, I realized. And so, I shifted out of the gear of trying to tell everybody about what I experienced and trying to get them involved, and started focusing on changing my life.

I would go back to India again in 1983.



Now I knew it was time for me to step away from my involvement with drugs, but I kept having this mindset of, “Okay, I’ll do some deals, I’ll put a bankroll together, and then I’ll retire.”

Didn’t work like that.

I started losing money for no logical reason. And then I got it one day. It was in January of 1984. It was a Friday, and it just hit me. I had to just quit.

At that point, I was in debt. I owed several people money. There was one guy I owed several thousand dollars to, and I called him up. I said, “Look, I don’t know when or if I’ll be able to pay you this money, but I can’t do this anymore.”

And he said, “Okay. Forget about it.”

Now, anybody who has seen any kind of movie or knows anything, read anything about drugs, knows that’s not the way it usually works.

But it did for me.

Everybody else who I owed money to either dropped the debt, or I gave them something in exchange –some stereo equipment, some artwork—and I was out of the business.

I was through.

I thought, “Okay. Now I’ll focus on my acupuncture practice.” I was teaching at the acupuncture school I had graduated from, and thought that would be the next phase of my life. But all of a sudden, it started falling apart.

I didn’t realize until later that I was being prepared to leave Chicago.

In 1985, there was a big event going on in India at my spiritual teacher’s ashram—the world conference and a celebration of his 60th birthday. And I wanted to go, but I was broke. I was so broke, I couldn’t afford to leave my apartment. It was amazing I still had an apartment.

I got a letter from a woman named Najah, who I had met on my first trip to India, saying, “I hope you’re going to the 60th birthday celebration and the world conference. It’s something that you’ve earned over many lives. Don’t worry about money. Make the arrangements, and the money will come.” And in her letter, she included the name of a travel agency in Los Angeles, Paru’s Travel & Tours.

Well, I called up and made reservations. It didn’t cost a penny, other than a phone call, and my phone hadn’t been cut off yet.

And then over the next few months, all of a sudden, things started occurring, so I had the money to go.

I arrived in India in November of 1985. I had come out through L.A., and when I got to my destination in India, I had \$30. I would spend three months in India, a month in Taiwan, and get back to Los Angeles with \$18. And I would never want for a thing the entire time that I was gone.

Well, I had some amazing experiences while I was in India. Just before I left, I was at another site. I had a roommate named Roy Mallow, guy from New York. We were sitting and talking one day, and he says, “Mike, do you mind if I share something with you? I’m somewhat psychic – I have this image I keep seeing.”

I said, “Sure.”

He goes on to describe, “I see you talking to people. I see you talking to thousands and thousands of people. All kinds of people – young and old, all kinds of races, people who are involved in spiritual things and people who are not.” He would go on to describe this in great detail. And I listened to it. It was interesting. And I thought, “Okay, cool. But, so what?!” I couldn’t think of how I could use this information at all.

As I said, I returned to Los Angeles with \$18, and no return ticket to Chicago.

Little did I know that Los Angeles was to be my home. I had an old friend from Chicago who lived there. I stayed at her place for a few days. She made it very, very clear she could only stand people around for four days or maybe a week.

I was there for about a month, and it wasn’t pretty.



One day, I'm really feeling blue. I don't know too many people, I don't have any money, I don't have a job, and I don't have a car. And in Los Angeles, you need a car to get around.

I'm walking down the street after coming from this spiritual meeting and I'm walking, literally, with my head hanging down. This piece of paper comes fluttering through the air. It lands at my feet. I look down and it says, "Smile. God loves you." And I picked up that piece of paper and I started to laugh. I still have that piece of paper on my wall in my office.

And I said, "Okay. I'm not worrying about this. Lord, you got to hook a brother up if you want him out here in L.A."

Within a month, I had a job, another place to stay, and a car, which I bought for one dollar. And that's a whole other story how I got that car. And the fact of the matter is, when I cleaned the car out, I found \$1.50 in change, so I made money on the deal.

Here I am now in Los Angeles, in California—acupuncture-oriental-medicine capital of the world. I'm thinking, "Okay, this is where I get my acupuncture license and I go on."

Every time I tried to get my acupuncture license out in Los Angeles, something happened. It would be like a Himalayan mountain range would fall into my path, but I kept trying. I kept trying.

I would come to understand that acupuncture was not a destination for me, it was vehicle. It would take me places where I needed to go.

In 1991 or thereabouts, my friend David Heller, who I'd gone to acupuncture school with in Chicago, had introduced me to a friend of his who had a business, Moonshine Trading. And he was conducting business at CAJE, a Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education at a conference in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California. And he had contacted me about working at this booth that he had.

While there, he introduced me to a man named Joel ben Izzy. And he introduced Joel to me as a professional storyteller.

I said, "You're what?! People pay you to tell stories? How you do that? I've been telling stories my whole life."



So I talked with Joel. He was very helpful, very encouraging, and while talking to him – it came to me. I said, “I’m going to do this, and my motto is going to be: HAVE MOUTH, WILL RUN IT.”

It came to me in a flash.

A few days later, I asked myself, “What would I do as a profession if I was independently wealthy?”

I said, “I’d tell stories.” I said, “Okay, that’s what I’m going to do.”

So I went and got business cards printed up. I went to my local library, I was living in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles at the time, and I started collecting collections of folk tales and books about storytelling.

One day, this librarian, Anthony Bernier, asked me, “Why are you getting all these books? Are you writing a paper?”

I said, “No, I’m a storyteller.”

He said, “You’re a storyteller? I’ve got these teenagers. They want to learn storytelling. Can you give them a workshop?”

I said, “Sure.”

My mother told me if I could read, I could do anything, and I believed her. So I gave the workshop. It was a great success, and I became a resource for the Los Angeles library system.

Once involved in storytelling, I met all these people, all kinds of storytellers. And, all of a sudden, I discovered this whole world of storytelling.

Then, it was very interesting how things that had happened were coming to fruition. That guy, Roy Mallow, he had said I’d be talking to all kinds of people.

In 1994, I was speaking at a spiritual conference in the Poconos. There were about 700-800 people at this conference. As I walked out to the podium and I looked into the audience, there sitting in the front row was Roy Mallow. His prophecy had come to pass.

I had another experience on another trip to India in 1989. I had been there to visit this spiritual teacher again, and I had this routine where I stayed in my room. I went to darshan, which means to be in a presence to view a holy person. There was morning darshan. There was afternoon darshan. After the morning darshan, I would meet with the group I was travelling with, have lunch and usually stayed in my room until the afternoon session.

One day, I'm in my room. All of a sudden, I find myself getting up, gathering my things, and leaving. I have no idea where I'm going or why. It's as if I'm a passenger in my body.

I'm watching myself walking down a street, thinking maybe I'm going to this place.

I walk past there.

Maybe I'm going over here.

I walk past that place.

I found myself walking to this restaurant, and I'm thinking, "Why am I going to this restaurant? One, I'm not hungry. And two, they're not serving."

I open up the door.

There are three people sitting at a table—a guy named Gerry I know who is also there for our spiritual teacher, and this Israeli woman and a Japanese man who are travelers in the area.

They all look at me.

Gerry looks at those two people and says, "Here he is."

He'd just been trying to tell them some stories about Baba, and had just said, "Michael should be here to tell you stories," when I walked in to the door.

Well now, I had this whole world, this whole new career.

Now I had gotten married in 1990, and that wife left me in 1992. The whole idea of being a storyteller as a profession was a little bit much. She thought that I had lost my mind, and there were times when indeed I thought that I had lost my mind.

Well one day, after I'd been doing storytelling for maybe two years, I was at a funeral of a friend who had passed away in Los Angeles. After this funeral, people were gathered talking about him.

I noticed someone standing off to the side. And I thought, "Well, let me introduce myself to this brother. We obviously had a mutual friend."

As I approached him, he looked at me and said, "What's your name?"

I said, "Michael."

He said, "You're from Chicago."

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "You went to St. Finbar." The elementary school in Chicago that I had gone to and been torn down a millenium before.

Stan had also gone to St. Finbar. He was four years behind me. His sister had been in my class. And in 1969, just after I'd gotten kicked out of high school, when he was in eighth grade, his eighth-grade teacher, who had been my eighth-grade teacher, Sr. Mary Brenda, had asked me to come and talk to his class about what was going on—the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and what have you. I had gone there and told stories about black history and culture, talked about the importance of freedom, talked about the importance of standing up for what you believe in. Well, he proceeded to tell me how the stories that I had told him that day had affected his life and how, as a teacher now in the LA area, he imparts to his students lessons based on the stories that I told him that day. I had totally forgotten about that incident, and it became clear that I was doing the right thing. I would have so many experiences as a storyteller. I would meet so many wonderful people; I would have the opportunity to travel the country and to travel the world. It was wonderful.



Now, one of the stories that I do, an independent story, is called “Vindication,” and I’m going to tell you about this story. A few years ago, about 2004 or 2003, some former classmates from St. Ignatius had started petitioning the school that myself and my buddy Gerry Tyler receive our high school diplomas. Come to find out that many of the things that we had demanded in that walkout have been implemented in the school. There were now more minorities in the school, they had developed outreach programs in the community, and there was a Black Studies program. In fact, I can remember, there was one time I had stopped by the school, back during the ‘70s, sometimes after I had gotten out of the service. And I had gone by the school to see one of my friends who had been an underclassman to me when I was at Ignatius. And I had run into the principal, who had been a teacher at the school when I had been there. He gave me a tour of the school, and things had already started changing. And at one point he said, “Mac, this is all because of you and Tyler.” Well I was trying to find this friend, Ted, and I couldn’t find him, and I had to go, and I saw a young black freshman walking down the hall, and I said, “Excuse me, but do you know Mr. Edwards?”

He said, “Yeah.”

I said, “Will you see him today?”

He said, “Sure.”

I said, “Will you tell him that Michael McCarty stopped by and said ‘Hello?’”

He said, “McCarty!?! Of McCarty and Tyler?”

We were legendary. These friends have started this movement, and on August 2, 2008, myself and Gerry Tyler will receive our high school diplomas, almost 40 years later! My mother would be very, very, very proud. There were many things that happened in my life—both good and bad. There’s a quote from an Indian spiritual teacher named and the essence of it is, “I am grateful for all the things that have happened in my life, the bad as well as the good. Because who I am today is the sum total of all of these things.”



Now there will be people who will say, “Well, these are a lot of coincidences.” I pronounce it differently; I call it “Co-Incidence.” My very first trip to India, I met a fellow named Pierre La Joie from New York and he told me this phrase, and I never forgot it: “For those who are unaware, coincidence is God’s way of being inconspicuous, but for those who know, it’s God’s way of showing off.” Well, my life has been full of these “Co-incidences” and, now, that’s the end of that.

