

The Gift of Hope

Buffalo – December, 1973

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Adapted from a chapter in the novel, *Love, Hate and Hope*

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Raj Yoga, the eight-fold path, seemed to be a better organized way to find God than what I was taught growing up.

First of all, the yogis had no dark confessionals with smelly little priests who asked way too many questions about how I knew I was a lesbian when I was fifteen. And there were no bloody crosses to make me feel even guiltier for being such a perv.

Would the yogis have blamed *me* with prayers of penance when my mother's boyfriend raped me? She was at Christmas choir practice and came home late humming the Halleluiah Chorus, pausing at my door of my room. I pretended to sleep, crying as quietly as I could, the stink of his beer breath still on my pillow. I was sixteen.

I started to get interested in the Eastern stuff in college, when the Beatles went to India to learn meditation. Then, in '71, when George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord" became the biggest single of the year, I was fascinated by how he fused lyrics that worshiped both Christ and Krishna.

Why shouldn't an odd girl like me join an odd religion? County social worker by day and folksinger by night, my long blond hair helped me blend in with the other twenty-somethings who ate veggie food at the yoga retreats. The swamis were the missionaries and we were the natives, wearing ill-fitting robes and singing Hindu chants we didn't understand.

I was fascinated to learn that the first two steps in Raj Yoga, the Yamas and Niyamas, echoed the Ten Commandments as a framework for moral living. But the penalty for breaking one of them wasn't an eternity in hell. Instead the punishment was your own guilt that kept you from seeing God's goodness. Some of the other steps, like hatha yoga and meditation, could help you let go of that guilt.

I was intrigued. Since my teens, I had no doubt that when I died I would burn in the eternal fires of hell because I was a homosexual. But what if I had misunderstood sin? What if God really loved everyone, including a gay girl like me?

So, I began to read Thomas Merton, a Christian monk who seemed to respect the Eastern faiths. When I learned that Martin Luther King made a pilgrimage to India to learn about the strategies and the spirituality of Mahatma Ghandi, I studied both of them, too. A single woman like me, with an occasional fake boyfriend, has a lot of time to read.

I also got a copy of the New Testament where all of Jesus' words were printed in red, so I could find and meditate on them. Weren't all religions really saying the same things about compassion and the Golden Rule?

About a year ago, in the fall of '72, I was asked to run a Saturday evening coffee house in the basement of a Methodist church. I started to read about them too, and really liked John Wesley's idea that important decisions should be based on Scripture, but balanced by our traditions, experience and reason. It was a much better system than having to ask "how high?" when some priest said "jump."

I had played at *The Bridge* a couple of times before the pastor's wife died. It didn't pay as much as the bar gigs, but nobody smoked and everybody listened. The mellow music and the candles flickering on the checked tablecloths attracted a constant stream of hippies and others, all of us drawn to folk music in the era of peace, love and protest.

The third time I played there, Pastor Rich asked for help. "Since Marilyn died, we haven't had anyone who knows the folk music scene well enough to book new acts for us." He pushed his long brown curls away from his face. "I wonder if you'd like to be our musical hostess, lining up performers and helping with publicity. You could keep maybe a third of the donations for yourself, and the remainder would go to the other performers. Our committee would take care of the set-up, refreshments and clean-up."

My heart beat faster. A regular gig where people listened to the music? Where I could invite other musicians I liked and, maybe, play with them?

“Honestly, that sounds wonderful, I’d be delighted to help,” I said as I reached out to shake his hand. “Thank you very much. When would you...”

“Guitar! Guitar!” interrupted the blond toddler clinging to his leg.

“This is Becky, my two year old,” Rich smiled, caressing her head. “She loves music.”

“Her favorite song is the ‘ABCs’,” said a pretty brown-haired girl who joined us. She was about six, the same age as my son would be. They took Stephen from me right after he was born, when I was seventeen.

“Donna, this is Rachel, my very smart first grader,” Rich said, introducing us. She took his big hand in her two small ones, draping his arm over her shoulder and leaned against his leg, smiling up at me.

“Guitar!” chirped Becky.

“Hi Becky, I’m Donna,” I said, leaning down toward her. “Would you like to sing the ‘ABCs?’” I asked.

Becky jumped toward me with both feet. “Guitar!”

“That means ‘yes’,” Rachel laughed as her dad hugged her closer.

I picked up my guitar and sat down on the edge of the little platform that was the stage, gesturing for Becky to stand in front of me. I made the chords with my left hand and, each time we sang a letter, I guided her fingers across the strings with my right.

By the time we reached ‘P’, she was ready to start her solo career, singing and banging the strings by herself. Then, she gave herself a noisy encore before her father picked her up and Rachel distracted her with a cookie.

My tears blurred them as they moved away, Rachel tickling, Rich spinning, and Becky squealing. What a beautiful love they shared.

I want a life of love, but God has cursed me so I can only search in secret.

Most recently I found it with Carol, a co-worker, who gave me the gift of hope. It was the first beautiful day of spring and our Social Services supervisor was off, so we decided to take a long lunch at the Erie Basin Marina.

We both felt the connection, as we sat in the sunshine with a warm breeze coming off the lake. Carol was on the verge of celebrating her one year wedding anniversary, but was unhappy with her husband and planned to end the marriage.

For six months, we snuck away for some incredible evenings, lots of belly laughs, and one glorious summer weekend. But many promises later, when the last few leaves were still clinging to the trees, she decided she couldn't leave her husband.

As she walked out my door for the last time, she said, "I'm sorry. Maybe I just wanted a 'forbidden fling' before I settled down to become a mother."

I was devastated, and requested a transfer to another department the next day.

A week later, on Thanksgiving, I took my dog, Bailey, on a walk across the Peace Bridge to visit Canada. We stopped in the middle, between the American and the Canadian flags. I leaned over the rail and spit, timing how long it would take to hit the water. I did it again, watching the white spit fall against the blue water. Lasting peace was waiting. Just an easy hop over the cold rail, seven seconds of terror, then nothing. My heart raced as I tensed, getting ready to jump.

But who would take care of Bailey? He had such a sweet look on his face. I couldn't leave him alone in the middle of the bridge, could I?

I got down on one knee and rubbed him behind his ears, just the way he liked. He licked my hand and wagged his little butt, happy that I was paying attention to him.

As we turned back to Buffalo I started to do pranayama, my yoga breathing, along with the walking meditation that kept me grounded in the present moment. Whenever my thoughts drifted to the despair that was drowning me, I let my attention return to

my breath, grateful for the little glimmers of God I could sense glinting in the trees by the river and gleaming from the skyline.

When we reached Riverside Park, where I had left my car, I gave Bailey as many doggie treats as he wanted to thank him for saving me. He really is my best friend.

The yogis have a practice called 'brahmacharya.' It means sexual self-restraint and the intent is to deepen your spiritual practice, similar to the vow of celibacy that Catholic priests and nuns follow. Would that be the best path for me? To live as a single woman and become a Yoga teacher? Find comfort in the Spirit that is always around us, instead of snatching forbidden love in the shadows?

Then yesterday happened. While walking through the Main Place Mall to shop on my lunch break, suddenly Christ was everywhere. Literally. No trumpets. No choir of angels. No voice from on high. Just about a hundred shoppers walking around with Christ's head on their shoulders.

I stopped breathing. Was I crazy?

Long dark hair framed His face and a beard shrouded His jaw. His head was perched atop the short, tall, fat and skinny bodies of office workers and others doing their normal noontime shopping three weeks before Christmas.

My heart hammering wildly, I staggered toward a round bank of a dozen pay phones, each recessed into a silver oval. I stumbled there, an island in the middle of the bustle, my knees wobbling, collapsing onto the safety of the belly-high shelf, supported equally by my forearms and legs.

I brought my nose to within inches of the phone and closed my eyes, afraid to look. What the hell was that? Jesus? Christ? Crazy? Crazy?

After a few breaths, I opened my eyes and turned, supporting myself on my left elbow as I slowly looked up from my shoes into the faces of the shoppers. Normal. ...Normal. ...Normal. I took a deep breath and felt my shoulders relax.

And then it happened again.

I looked up to the second-floor walkway that ringed the mall. The Christs were there too, everywhere on both sides. I stared at one Jesus on the upper level, wearing a bright red coat walking toward me. As she neared, I saw a circle of fur looping under His beard. Then, as she passed above me, I saw the fur was secured by the jaws of the dead animal, its head hanging behind her right shoulder, latched onto its own tail. A fox? A weasel? Its lifeless eyes reflected the colored Christmas lights.

After ten seconds, the second sighting stopped. Everyone kept walking as if they had no idea that their skulls had just been transformed into the head of Christ, Son of God and Savior of the Universe.

I waited a couple of minutes, resting against the booth, hoping it wouldn't happen again. What *was* that?

I walked, shaky, to the elevator, mostly staring at everyone's feet to avoid any more surprises, then down to the underground parking garage shared by Mall shoppers and county employees.

I sat in my car and stared at the dirty white wall it faced. I couldn't go back to work and spend the afternoon as a Social Services Examiner telling poor, desperate women they couldn't get welfare checks because their paperwork was incomplete.

What was that? A hallucination? After all, it was hard to be shunned by society without being chronically depressed or anxious. I knew that, sooner or later, my mental health was going to be destroyed. Was this the first sign of my emotional collapse?

Maybe I should talk to Pastor Rich? He was such a nice guy, and didn't have an obvious anti-gay agenda. Over the past year, I cherished the times I babysat for his girls, nearly every Wednesday from four-thirty to nine-thirty when he scheduled his church meetings so he could spend his other evenings at home.

The day after I saw all the Christs, I called in sick, then phoned Rich for an appointment. He said he was free at 3 PM and looked forward to seeing me.

When I stepped into the lobby of the Oakwood Church, Tony, one of the church leaders, was emerging from the hallway that led to the offices and the education wing. As he moved towards me, buttoning the expensive overcoat that hung from his bony shoulders, the corners of his mouth curled up into what he probably thought was a smile.

His pointy nose was aimed at the door, but he swiveled his eyes toward me and said, "Hello, Donna, how are you? Not working today?"

The self-important little bastard. A half-dozen encounters over the past year convinced me that he had perfected the art of finding a weak spot, then picking at it, like a bird that plays with its prey before eating it.

"Hi, Tony. No, I thought I deserved a wellness day so I took the day off. Since I've been working for Social Services, I've hardly taken any sick time."

Why am I explaining myself, no, justifying myself to him?

"So, you're having a little visit with Pastor Rich?" he said, words dripping with slime.

"Yes, isn't this a workday for you, too?"

"It is, but we're having an important meeting of the Staff Parish Relations Committee next week. It will be a very sensitive discussion so I thought it would be good to sit down with the Pastor so he wouldn't be blindsided."

Uh oh, is Rich in trouble? Is it about me? My stomach tightened against the butterflies that began beating their wings.

Suddenly, I had a flash of Tony as a young boy, afraid of bullies, but pretending to be brave. Becoming smarter because he wasn't stronger. Hurt that nobody liked him.

A wave of tenderness washed through me toward him.

"Well, you know," I said, "I'm not a member of the church, but I've been around here enough to know something about all the good things that you and your wife do for the rest of us, and I'm grateful for it."

His face looked like it was paralyzed as he turned his beak toward me.

“Well, I’ve got to go,” I said, smiling at the sweet little heart inside him, resisting the urge to pat his shoulder as I walked by. “Enjoy the sunshine. Whoever said Buffalo has bad winters got it wrong this week, huh?”

I walked down the dark paneled hallway, smelling of too much furniture polish, towards Rich’s office.

What was that? Tony would bounce me out of here in a minute if he knew I was gay. Suddenly, I’m being nice to him?

The door to Rich’s office was open. Head in both hands, he was staring at a paper on his desk. I knocked on the doorjamb.

“Donna, come in,” he said, a smile brightening his face. “I just want to get some coffee, would you like a cup?”

“Just a glass of water would be fine, thanks,” I said as sat down at the table by the window, bare except for a Kleenex box.

“Be right back,” he said.

The bookshelf behind his desk featured a picture of him and Marilyn. It had been over a year since the accident took her.

I had seen that picture before when I was babysitting, exploring the house after the girls fell asleep. It was next to his bed, turned toward the pillows. Rich and Marilyn must have been dancing, holding each other, swirling with delight, laughing, their eyes shining into each other’s, her hand against his neck. If the picture had a name, it would be love.

I remembered how love felt, years ago, far away in a room on Cape Cod, where Alia, my college sweetheart, held me in her arms as we hid from the world, her brown eyes smiling at me.

Rich and the girls lived in a love museum. Scenes of birthday parties, backyard swings and babies crowded the shelves in the living room and the dining room. In their wedding pictures, Rich was handsome and proud, Marilyn glowing, her hair long like mine, looking like the older sister I never had. Like the woman I would never become.

Their refrigerator was papered with a blizzard of brags about the girl's latest triumphs: Becky's crayoned scrawls and alphabet magnets; Rachel's school pictures, report card and a certificate for having the highest-flying kite at the Indian Guide festival.

What a life I could have had if God hadn't made me gay.

Rich came back with a mug of coffee, a delicious-smelling dark roast, and a glass of water for me.

"I'm so glad you've come to visit, Donna," he said as he sat down. "Everything you've been doing to manage our coffee house has been great. The music has been wonderful, and I think the crowd last month was the biggest we've ever had."

"Yeah. The 'Brotherhood' duo was a big draw," I said.

"And, I'm especially grateful for all the babysitting you've been doing with the girls. They're so happy whenever I tell them that you're coming over to watch them."

"They're so sweet. I love being with them."

"I know the feeling is mutual," he said. "So, what can I do for you today?"

"Well, first, I saw Tony as I was coming in. But what he said seemed kind of ominous. Are you in trouble?"

Rich made a sound halfway between a laugh and a snort. "Sometimes I think that if I'm not in trouble, I'm not doing my job. So, I suspect that I must be doing a very good job because, yes, I am in serious trouble."

My stomach flipped. "What's wrong?"

He rubbed his chin and looked out the window. “Well, everyone will know soon enough, so I might as well tell you now. There’s a faction in the church, led by Tony, that has a list of grievances about me. There will be a formal presentation of the grievances at the Staff Parish Relations Committee.”

“I’m not really sure what that committee does.”

“Well, in theory, the Bishop appoints ministers to each church but, in practice, it’s the SPRC that does the hiring and the firing. They can refuse to accept the Bishop’s appointed minister, or ask him to leave if they decide they don’t like him.”

“Might they ask you to leave?” Becky and Rachel gone? “Where would you go?”

“Wherever the Bishop wants me to go. Our conference includes all of upstate New York State. Before I was sent here, I served a church in Albany.”

A five-hour drive. If he left I might never see them again. No more happy afternoons or quiet evenings with loving girls in a loving home.

“What doesn’t the SPRC like about the job you’re doing?”

“They have a list which Tony, as the chairperson, was kind enough to share with me,” he said, rolling his eyes. He walked to his desk and came back with a paper that had maybe a half-dozen little paragraphs on it.

“Here’s a sample,” he said, reading from it:

- “Sermons are sometimes preached with more references to popular songs, secular essays and movies than the Bible;
- When Vietnam or national politics are raised during informal and formal discussions, the Pastor often advocates for anti-war, liberal Democratic causes, instead of encouraging parishioners to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer;
- Over the past few months, young women have been observed leaving the parsonage late at night, creating the possibility of a scandal.”

“Rich, are they talking about me? The times I’ve been babysitting, and stayed to visit after you got home?” I asked.

“Well, the only two babysitters I use are you and Mrs. Cottage. And even on a dark night, nobody is going to think that an overweight senior citizen with a limp is a young woman.”

If Tony knew I was gay, would Rich be in less trouble?

“Rich, do you know that I’m gay?”

I blurted it out without really being ready. I had planned to share my secret today, but I wanted to tell him first about the apparition. Impress him with my Godliness before sharing my sinfulness.

A glow grew in his eyes as he looked at me with a half-grin.

My heart was thudding. Did he think my confession was funny?

“I’m glad you told me,” he said.

“So why the little smile?” I asked.

“I’m sorry. I guess I’m smiling because now that I know the truth about you, we can be better friends.”

“Really?”

“Donna, you are a very warm, very talented and very lovely young woman,” he said. “But, as I’ve gotten to know you, I began wondering why you rarely dated and never seemed to have a boyfriend. I guessed that either you were gay, or that your heart has been badly broken.”

“For me it’s both,” I said, tears suddenly spilling onto my cheeks.

“Oh, Donna, I’m so sorry,” he said, leaning towards me, his fingers touching the back my hand.

In the past year, he had never touched me or hugged me, even once. Could he do that now because he knew I was ‘safe’?

“I can’t imagine many paths harder to walk in our society than being gay,” he said.

“Yes,” I agreed, “and to be honest, churches make it a lot more difficult. Don’t all of you believe that a homosexual is a sinner who will never get to heaven?” I heard my voice rising over ...my fears? ...my anger? “Don’t you want me to quit the coffeehouse and stay away from your daughters, now that you know I’m not normal?”

Rich’s gaze turned to the window, and he took a deep breath.

Please don’t send me away. Not from the girls. Not from the music. Not from you.

“The girls’ hearts were broken when Marilyn died,” he said looking back at me, “but you are helping them heal. I see how you are with them. You’re not just babysitting, you’re loving them. Whether or not you’re gay has nothing to do with the beautiful relationship you have with them.

“I’m not sure I should tell you this,” he continued, “but this church has at least a dozen members who are gay. Some with important leadership positions, and some who don’t keep it a secret anymore.”

“I thought this church is against homosexuality.”

“The United Methodist Church is but I’m certainly not.”

I felt a surge of hope lighten me. Rich won’t condemn me for being gay?

“However,” he added, “our general conference just passed a rule that says that ‘the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching’ and ‘self-avowed practicing homosexuals’ are not to be ordained as ministers.”

“‘Self-avowed *practicing* homosexuals are not to be ordained as ministers.’” I repeated. “So, celibate gays can serve as ministers?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered. “A number have churches in our district.”

“Women, too?”

“Certainly,” he said.

Could this be an option for me? Maybe become a Methodist minister instead of a yoga teacher? Or do both?

“Rich, I’m trying to decide what to do. Just before Thanksgiving, my heart was broken by a woman I really loved. Since then, I’ve been thinking that maybe I’d be happier if I just stayed single, maybe as a yoga teacher whose life is devoted to God. The yogis call it ‘bramacharya’ which I think is the same as the vow of celibacy that priests and nuns take, a choice to be comforted by God’s love, instead of human love.”

“But, just now,” I continued, “when you mentioned that celibate gays could become Methodist ministers, I wondered if that’s a possibility for me.”

“Wow,” he said leaning toward me, “I had no idea you went through a bad break-up. I’m so sorry.” His forehead wrinkled. “You have so much going on, you probably shouldn’t rush into anything right now. Celibacy? Becoming a minister? Those are big decisions.

“But I have to ask,” he continued, “why the Methodist Church? There are other Christian denominations that are much more accepting of homosexuality.”

“I like what I’ve read about the methods of Methodism,” I said, “balancing Scripture with other factors in decision-making. And I’m intrigued by the small groups Wesley started where people helped each other focus on their goals for spirituality and social justice.”

“Yes, that’s what attracted me, too. I’d like to see more small groups start in this church.”

“I would definitely join that kind of a group,” I said. “You know, I’ve attended a number of your services and I almost always get something of value from your sermons. But then everyone jumps up to sing a hymn before I’ve really had a chance to think about how I can absorb it into my life.

“The other thing that attracts me to the Methodist Church,” I continued, “is that the rules are voted on by both the clergy and the members. So, maybe someday, I could

help change the rules about accepting homosexuals.” Plus, if I was studying to become a Methodist minister, I could stay close to Becky and Rachel.

Rich raised his cup for another sip. “It would be a difficult path,” he said, speaking slowly. Was he discouraging me?

“Difficult, yes,” I said, a little annoyed that he didn’t get it, “but do you have any idea of how hard it is to live as a gay woman? ...to find love? And once you find it, who can you tell? When can’t you even hold hands without worrying that someone might see?”

I gestured toward the picture of him and Marilyn. “Would I ever be able to put a picture of me and my lover in my office like you did?”

He stared at the happiness they used to have, frowning. “You’re right, Donna. I can’t really imagine how difficult it must be for you.”

“So, should I keep looking for lesbian love and stay in the shadows? Or should I dedicate myself as a single woman, maybe even a minister, and work toward equality for homosexuals in the church and in society? Christ never spoke against homosexuality, right? So maybe the rules can be changed.”

“It’s possible, but I think it would be unwise to build a career based on that hope,” he said.

I hesitated. “Well, can I tell you one other thing, a recent development, that is pushing me toward this ...or maybe pulling me?” I said.

“Okay. I have nothing else scheduled for the rest of the afternoon.”

I paused, feeling my palms start to sweat. “Yesterday, while walking through the Main Place Mall at lunchtime, all of a sudden everyone’s head turned into Christ.”

“What?” He sat up straight. “You imagined this?”

“No. I saw it.”

“You saw the face of Christ in everyone?”

“No, I saw the *head* of Christ *on* everyone. And it scared the shit out of me.”

He stared at me wide-eyed.

“Sorry for the the bad language, but it was such a shock: the long dark hair, the face, the beard, the whole thing. It was perched on top of everyone’s normal body, and they kept walking, wearing their normal clothes. I was so stunned, I almost fell down, but made it to a pay phone, closed my eyes and hung onto it. Maybe ten seconds later, I looked around and everyone had gone back to normal.

“But, almost immediately, it happened again. And this time, I could see all the Christs on the upper level, too, the balcony. The weirdest was a woman wearing a red coat with a fox stole around her shoulders right under Christ’s beard.”

It looked like Rich had stopped breathing. “I don’t know what to say,” he said. “What do you think it was?”

“Well, I’ve been under so much strain my whole life, I’ve always kind of assumed that someday I’d snap. So, social worker that I am, I assessed myself, and decided the most likely explanation for yesterday was a hallucination brought on by too much stress.”

Rich nodded and said, “Go on.”

“But I’ve been feeling unusually peaceful today. And twice, I’ve seen goodness I usually miss. The first was a driver who cut me off on Delaware this morning, then blared his horn and shook his fist. Usually that gets me angry, but today I wished him the grace to see his blessings.”

“Where did that come from?” asked Rich.

“I don’t know. It just popped into my head,” I said. “Maybe it was something I learned yesterday?”

“Do you think?”

“I don’t know.” I took a sip of water. “But what surprised me even more was my reaction to Tony when I got here. I’ve never really liked him and he hinted you were in

some kind of trouble. Then, all of a sudden, I started feeling this tenderness toward him, thinking about his being bullied as a child and his sweet little heart.”

“Tony has a sweet little heart?” Rich said with a lopsided grin. “Maybe I should go visit the Mall too.”

I laughed with him.

“Rich, I don’t know if what I saw yesterday was a hallucination or an apparition, but today I feel different. I used to believe that God was always with us. But today I know it. Christ is here in each of us, just waiting to be recognized.”

I paused, looking out the window. “Today I have hope.”

“Hope?”

“Yes. Christ’s love is just a thought away. What could be as stronger foundation for lasting hope?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve always hoped for romantic love and it always turned into despair.”

Rich looked at the picture of love on his bookshelf. “Or grief.”

“Yes,” I said, “ and I’m sorry for your loss. But we can’t lose the love of Christ, unless our anger, our fear and our guilt produces a ‘stupid vision’ that keeps us from seeing that love.

“Stupid vision?”

“Yeah,” I said. “One of the guys I sometimes sing with is a counselor. He says our feelings influence the facts we see, and when we’re in a bad mood we just see bad things. He calls it ‘stupid vision’.”

“I understand what you’re saying,” Rich said, “but how do we stop being angry, worried of guilty?”

“Well, the yogis teach people to meditate, bringing our minds back to the present moment to the calm where God always is, instead of getting stuck in anger or guilt from the past or fears in the future. I know meditation works.”

I took another sip of water. “But I’m more attracted to Christ’s final lesson. The one he taught when he was on the cross.”

“Forgiveness?” Rich said, and then he smiled. “Father, forgive them because they don’t know what they’re doing.’ Could it be that simple? We could all experience God’s love if we just forgive ourselves and others?”

“Yes,” I said, “I think so. I want to work toward equal rights for homosexuals in this church and in this country. But I think our ultimate happiness won’t depend on a law, or the words in a church rule book. Our ultimate happiness, and best hope, is to recognize that Christ lives in each other.”

“Like seeing Tony’s ‘sweet little heart’ even if he’s trying to get me fired?” Rich asked, and we both smiled.

“Exactly,” I said.

Outside the window, a gentle snow was falling. “Yesterday you went Christmas shopping,” Rich said, “but I think you were the one who received a gift.”

“Thank you, Lord,” I said.

Dr. Tom DeLoughry’s interest in the the mind, body and spirit is reflected in his career directing adolescent services in child psychiatry; wellness and disease management at a large managed care organization; and a Franciscan retreat center. *Being Your Best*, his collection of stories, strategies and studies, was honored with AARP’s *Social Impact Award* as “a simple mind-body-spirit program for seniors, adults and teens of any faith, or no faith.”



A Bible,
open to a plea for forgiveness,
was found fused to molten metal
in the rubble of the Twin Towers.

*Was it a message from
Donna, an ex-minister,
who disappeared that day?*

The story travels back to the ‘60s,
the Bahamas, Buffalo, Vietnam
and the World Trade Center
for answers.

This story is adapted from a chapter in *Love, Hate and Hope*, a novel that will be published in 2017. To learn more, or obtain a review copy prior to publication, contact Tom at tdeloughry@gmail.com or www.BeingYourBest.org