

# MY PERSONAL JOURNEY\_

The left wing plowed the rain-soaked field as mud blanketed the cabin window and the plane cart-wheeled, sheared left and broke apart. The right wing opened to the sky and I was flung out, still strapped to the seat, landing upright amidst the tornado-driven rain and hailstones.

The vision of the burning wreck was seen for the first time from afar. I was "Nathan" with all my senses, weightless and removed from all that was happening below me. There was a beautiful, azure blue environment of buoyancy, which was so peaceful and right that no words of mine have ever been able to describe it fully.

Then I was back with "myself" within the burning circle of debris and explosions; and then out again, several times, perhaps many times this was repeated as Nathan moved higher away from the scene below. At one point, the pull from below being persistent, I said aloud to myself: "Okay-- move your legs. If your legs move and you can walk, I'll stay with you. Otherwise I am not coming back again." I addressed myself as "you" and looked at my situation with detachment. Upon making the ultimatum, I "locked-in," unbuckled, stood up and soon after I was working with others to help clear the burning area as rescue vehicles began to arrive.

Ambulances came and went, and then there was one small highway truck whose driver asked me if I needed a lift. The dark night and rain obscured the scene, but suddenly he saw my condition (bloodstained clothes, one shoe) and asked: "Were you on the plane?" No reply was needed as he helped me into his truck and drove back to the airport terminal. All the other vehicles had gone to area hospitals so we were the only one to arrive at the terminal.

Seemingly, people there were unaware of the crash when I walked in and the sight of me caused a commotion. Some good soul offered me a chair and before long I realized I was being taken to a nearby hospital.

The next morning, July 4, 1963, my first visitor was a kindly lady from the Red Cross who gave me shoes, pants, a shirt and shaving kit, which I took to the men's room. I shaved, dressed and walked out without ceremony to the railroad station where I boarded the next train to New York without, however, a ticket, wallet or identification. When the conductor came by, I pointed to the headline in the New York Times newspaper describing the crash and told him that I had been on board the plane. I thought I was lucid but apparently he presumed that I was in shock and called ahead to have a State Trooper meet me and return me to my home in Greenwich, Connecticut.

I was deep in shock, and my body was so severely compacted by the crash that it was no longer functioning. My outward appearance was normal; internally all had come to a standstill. The doctor told my father of my problems and together they counseled me to try to stimulate my body functions by simulating them mentally. It was my first experience with the concept of biofeedback, which subsequently became a principal part of my life experience and gave rise to my perception of the interaction of the *contents* and the *container*, and added a vital new dimension to my life.

My flight that morning of July 3 from Westchester Airport to Rochester, NY on Mohawk Airlines was a business trip to conclude a merger negotiation. I was a highly active forty-four-year-old businessman in the midst of forming and operating companies in natural resources and international commerce. Suddenly, I found myself on the sidelines, and business was brought to a halt.

It was more than a year before I began to exercise decision-making activities, but the interim had not been a void. As I regained my body functions, I increased my mental awareness, until I realized that I was in control as a separate entity. *My eyes did not see; I saw through my eyes. My fingers did not feel; I felt through my fingers. My feet did not walk; I directed my feet to move. I did not believe it when I saw it; I saw it when I believed it.* This increasing transformation of consciousness occurred over the year and took the place of my entrepreneurial enterprises. I took time to read philosophy and attempted to relate my experience and its

insights into deeper meanings of life. After reading the philosophers' densely-argued writings devoted to minute technical points of language and logic in the conventional fashion of academic philosophical study, I came to the conclusion that narrative was preferable to argument and that philosophy (as traditionally presented) fails to inform. Logic alone was inconclusive; it required clarification to complete concepts. Rene' Descartes wrote: "*I think, therefore I am.*" But he failed to say "what" I am. He should have completed the narrative with "**I am to think.**"

With this thought in mind, I turned to writing philosophical essays on my own terms, with the basic requirement of the logical clarification of thought and with the aim of confronting the deepest concerns of human life in an original and illuminating way. "*The Birth of Thought,*" "*The Process Called Life,*" "*The Proof of Being,*" "*The Echo of our Soul*" were four of the ten essays that found their way into a book titled **BECOMING, Coming Into Being.**

Surviving the disastrous air crash was not the only turbulent experience I had, but it was the first in a civilian capacity and without preparation. Twenty years earlier, I participated in three landings as a "beach master" at Casablanca, Salerno and Southern France during World War II, and later witnessed the chaotic revolution in China. These experiences also took their place in the shaping of my thoughts and philosophical expressions.

## **THERE WAS A WORLD WAR**

Graduation from Rhode Island State College was on a Thursday in 1941. I was a Second Lieutenant in uniform under my ceremonial cap and gown. June was still six months to December, but we knew then that war was imminent. On Saturday, a telegram came for the First Army District of New England with orders to report to Fort Benning, Georgia, to the Command and Staff College. I had been selected to represent the District for this assignment. On Tuesday, with over 200 others, we stood at attention in the

auditorium when General Patton strode on stage and said: "Gentlemen, we are about to go to war. Your book days are past. You are here now to learn the art of survival under combat conditions. It will be like nothing you have ever experienced, and we shall try our best to make up for that in the next few weeks ahead." He was true to his word; they lost no time in getting started. The very next day we were crawling under barbed wire with fixed machine guns firing overhead. The next day we were digging foxholes (deep enough for tanks to move overhead). By Friday we were taking bayonet drill. Saturday night was time out downtown where it was not unusual to end up with a brawl between the local National Guard unit and our Army group. The transition from college to combat was like a plunge into ice water ---- abrupt and at once breathtaking.

Fast-forward to December 7, 1941, World War II was now a reality. New services were being formed, reassignments were being made, and volunteers were being called for. Beach landings and mobile ports were the new thing that appealed to me and I was reassigned to Fort Hamilton, New York as Company Commander of the Sixth Mobile Port Headquarters.

Within a year, we were in the storm-tossed mid-Atlantic for a November landing in North Africa at Casablanca, where the French Free Forces offered no resistance, but the port was blocked with sunken ships alongside. It was a sleepless week of opening the area for troops and supplies to move inland before the German Army had time to react.

Then we had time to revise our plans and get ready for our turn at Italy. At Salerno, we had a different kind of reception. The German Army was dug-in atop the hills surrounding the beachhead. Africa was far away, too far for our fighter planes overhead to protect us and we had only two-hour, limited air cover. The German air corps flew down from Rome frequently, turning around Mt. Vesuvius before strafing and bombing our positions. It was touch-and-go for a week while we brought in equipment and troops to break out of the rim of hills and on into Naples. The importance of Salerno was its key to the success of the Normandy landings in June, 1944. Salerno pulled German forces away from the French Front, and weakened them on the Russian Front. It was a fiercely-contested engagement; among the worst of the war.

Southern France at Cavalier was a similar trial, but we were by then professionals in every respect. Pinned down for three days on and near the landing area, with Toulon and Marseilles held by the German Army, we made a decision to slip behind the German lines and go cross country to the mouth of the Rhone River and open up Port-du-Bouc to make an end-run up the river. With three machine-gun mounted jeeps we made the one-day trip in three days through the retreating German lines, mostly at night, and with the help of the Free French Allies. The plan worked. Toulon and Marseilles fell five days after we opened Port-du-Bouc, and the troops started moving up the Rhone River. Africa had been the end of the beginning. France was the beginning of the end. There was no let-up, but the end was in sight. Thirty-six months in overseas combat was our life for as far as we could see ahead.

When it was finally over, and we were on troop ships headed home, we were not ready to face a new life ahead. It was the last night before landing in New York that sleeplessness broke in with the reality of the situation. We played poker all night and my long run of luck left me at the table. I bet my last dollar and when it went, I went on deck to watch the distant land lights ahead. After awhile, I reached into my pocket for the loose change there, and flung it into the ocean as a gesture to the start of a new life ahead. There were plenty of us along the deck rail, and thoughts were shared of what we had done and what we were leaving behind. I recall, in particular, the thought about our fortunes. "Did you ever think of not coming back?" None of us ever did! "Did you ever think of not winning the war?" None of us ever did! Unwounded and victorious, we were all of one mind. We had met the best that had been thrown at us, and concluded that we could handle whatever was ahead.

Fast forward to December, 1945. The war is ended, but its memory lingers on. Return to civilian life was more difficult than I thought. This young man in a suit and necktie was an inadequate image for a seasoned veteran with gold leaves and decorations from the American and French Governments for action in ground operations against the enemy in the liberation of the Port of Marseilles. The real problem in war is that you are pulled into the challenge of it. The return to civilian life for a youth who was void of any prior experience except war was more difficult than I had imagined it would be. After

several attempts to match experience with job opportunities, I looked overseas for a challenge. My father-in-law was the Inspector General of Customs in China, and the revolution there seemed to offer the opportunity I was looking for. Chase Bank, New York, planned to reopen its Shanghai branch. My application was accepted. Together with five others, we arrived in Shanghai in January, 1946 and remained until Shanghai fell to the Communists in 1948.

It was an immediate immersion into finance and business and a new and fascinating culture. The three years in China were as different from the three years in Africa and Europe as night and day. The war years were fought with real bullets; the revolution years were fought with silver bullets! In China, the procedure was “paved with money.” A city would be surrounded by an advancing army which camped outside it for a week or more. Money would change hands; the gates would be opened, and the city fell. It was not without problems for many, but there were no bombings or frontal assaults which had fire stormed the cities of Europe.

Shanghai was like a large Switzerland. Money poured in and out, in large sums and at great speed. Chinese businessmen are among the world’s best, and I was quick to learn. China engaged foreigners for their top financial posts including the Postal Service and the Customs Service. My father-in-law had joined the Customs Service as a graduate from Dartmouth College in 1914 and had ascended to the top post of Inspector General. I therefore had the advantage of being an “insider” and knew all that was happening on the political scene as one city after another fell to the advancing Communists, and in the financial markets as foreign exchange took flight.

The return to civilian life included the beginning of family life. My first child, a daughter, was born in Shanghai. As the Communists’ gains continued, the fall of Shanghai became a certainty, and plans were made to evacuate. Bank records were packed up and shipped out; personnel were reassigned; and an “arrangement” was made with the City Fathers to let all but one of the bank managers out. One key executive would remain behind as a hostage. The final episode, for me, was the transfer of the Government’s gold reserves on board an American destroyer to Taiwan and then embarkation on the American President Lines’ *President Wilson* for the return to San Francisco.

## WHERE AM I GOING?

Equilibrium restored and safely settled in Rhode Island with a family which grew to four children, I applied the China experience to entrepreneurial activities of my own, and prospered. Fifteen years of high energy activity was suddenly derailed with the air crash in 1963, which marked the dawn of a new outlook on life for me. It was no longer: *How to make a living?* But rather: *How to make a life?*

In Southern France during World War II, I had met a philosopher, Denys de Colomb, who engaged me in discussions and questions about “America” and how we would shape the world in the years to come. I do not recall all of his questions, but one observation he made stayed with me: “You do not fully understand something until you can reduce it to one word. Thirty-eight years later, when it came time to choose a title for the collection of philosophical essays about to be published, I recalled his statement and its challenge. There were ten essays, one each year beginning in 1968, each drawing on the cumulative life experiences of war, revolution, and the air crash. How to reduce them all to one word? I spread out the ten essays and changed their sequence until a pattern emerged which spoke to me as the summary of human destiny, a concept that I had not been conscious of before. I rearranged the ten essays into a Table of Contents, and separated them into three sections. As I studied this it dawned upon me that the essays were about the destiny of Human Beings. Human Beings are qualified Beings with a destiny of coming into Being. In one word, the title of the book must be **BECOMING**, with the subtitle ***Coming Into Being***.

Once it was published, in 1979, the need to continue to express my thoughts was unabated and I began to think of a trilogy to complete the cycle of human destiny. To me, it was perfectly natural to turn to the dictionary for a definition of my next subject: Human Being. This initiated a twenty-year contest with the dictionary companies over word meanings and common usage for even so basic a word as Human Being. My premise that “*we become as we think*” and that “*who we think we are will determine our destiny*” is the logical

clarification of thought. Incidentally, the word “logic” is followed in the dictionary by the word “log-jam,” defined as “deadlock, a situation where something is blocked or at a standstill and is unable to progress.” In a sense, then, this book is about the forces which compete to dominate our thoughts and how the outcome will determine our destiny as Human Beings.