

**Little Voices**  
**a one person play**  
**By Lucas Foss**

*Set: A living room with a (3 seat) couch, a very comfortable TV easy (Archie Bunker type) chair and a side table with props: junk food (ripple chips, chocolate, triscuits & cheese), ashtray(s), cigarettes, bottle of whisky, glass and a TV remote – Optional - floor rug, door mat and running shoes, Soulful Sex book, air freshener, CD and books.*

I've been thinking about my life lately, you know, how I live my life and I've been thinking about how like to I see everything in my life as a chore, you know, hard work and how I like to set my life *up* as a sort of a chore/reward dynamic, so I can *do* the work I have to do and not just my job, a chore can be anything: like taking visitors to Stanley Park, buying a Christmas Tree or shopping for socks – anything but all the while looking forward to when I can just sit back, relax, have a smoke, a drink, stuff my face, get a woman, watch TV ...or preferably a creative combination of the above ... but I've been hearing this nagging little voice lately telling me that I'm not really living my life

Anyway after 25 or 30 years of living for my comfort and some addictions I start to sense that maybe I'm not really happy and maybe there is something more but this creates a problem because once I start to realize I'm not happy and I decide I want to do something about that, then I *may* find that I have to let go of some of my addictions and comfort activities and replace them with what? ... real life things.... excepting a dinner invitation from a friend who would rather talk than watch television, hiking on Grouse Mountain, flossing or listening to CBC.

And I know even the *thought* of losing my comforts makes me nauseous ... but still I hear a little voice saying: "I need to find some kind of fulfillment '*inside*' yourself and not '*outside*' yourself" ... which of course just ends up being another *chore* in its' self.

And so then what I have to do is I have to find some kind of *new* more acceptable thing from the '*outside*' ... like chocolate, to comfort me in my *chore* of finding something on the '*inside*', just for a little while, until I've reached some success in finding something on the '*inside*' and boy oh boy it starts to get confusing when I start to want and value the *new* comfort from the '*outside*' more than the *little* I'm getting from the '*inside*' and this makes perfect sense in a way because I don't really believe that there is anything much '*inside*' myself to get anyway, but there's this little voice saying: "no no no no that's not quite right" and then I start to wonder where is that little voice coming from ... it's not the same as the *other* voice that tells me to give my self what I want.

So I light up a smoke to think about all this and figure it out because *I know* I think better when I *am* smoking and in fact there have been studies scientific studies that prove that smoking actually stimulates brain activity, which is why most creative people smoke, so I think and think about these little voices that *seemingly* want me to do opposing activities for my self.

And I start to wonder what is the *self* anyway and I go to Banyan Books and try and find that *one* book that will tell me about these voices and these different selves but holy smokes when I get there...there are so many books on so many different subjects and somehow I seem to think I should know about all this stuff, because all the *other* people in Banyan Books seem to know what *they're* doing because they seem to know where *they're* going ... and I wonder if asking for help is codependent or is it interdependent or maybe asking for help is like no longer being anonymous or maybe asking for help is like connecting with your vulnerability and maybe I should try to surrender to this voice because there are so many books ...and these store staff are so calm, they're probably really enlightened, but I pretend I know what I'm doing and I try to find the book my self and as I walk down the aisles I notice a lot of *beautiful* women that I might like to be in relationship with or even marry ...tomorrow, but they seem too, I don't know, too healthy or well adjusted to even approach.

And so I sit down on the hard stool that's there ... and then I remember a good friend of mine once told me of how a book just *jumped out at her* when she was in Banyan and it turned out to be the perfect book for her *at that moment in that* time in her life and so I get up and begin to walk up and down and back and forth all the aisles holding *all* the different shelves of *all* the different books *waiting and wanting* desperately to have a book *jump* out at me and of course nothing happens and so then I think what I will do is to repeat this exercise but this time

with my eyes closed because *maybe* it's a kind of a sensing thing and I'll hear a little voice telling me to stop *just* at the right place...and *I do I do* hear a little voice after a while and it tells me to go out and have a smoke, but I realize that I left them in your car and as I start to leave, all of a sudden I stop ... because I notice a book and I can't believe the experience that I'm having in this moment: the title is resonating *deeply* within me and I feel some kind of vibration *deep* within me and a voice says – “this is it – this is the book” and I feel a little frightened and excited at the same time because all of a sudden I begin to wonder - is this God talking to me – speaking to me as he has to so many others at Banyan Books and I pull the book from its shelf with its *beautifully* illustrated cover of naked bodies...the “Kama Sutra”, of course this makes perfect sense to me, of course this is the perfect way for me to find my self and maybe even God. And as I flip through the pages looking and reading...I begin to feel intimidated by something but I'm not sure what it is and then I realize how much this book costs and I remind my self that I'm not *actually* in relationship right now and then I notice another book with a bright yellow cover called “Soulful Sex” and it seems easier to read and although there are no pictures it is cheaper and so I hold both these books in my hands, eyes closed, feeling their weight, trying to decide because I seem to be hearing 2 different voices simultaneously each pulling me in a different direction.

And then I hear another voice and it's soft and gently saying "get the 'Soulful Sex' book" and I can hardly believe that I've finally got in touch with me feminine voice and I open my eyes and there's a *woman* standing there, smiling at me knowingly and I know I've been caught with my eyes closed , doing this new age weighing and sensing approach to decision making and I can't quite tell what she looks like and I can only hold her gaze for a moment and then I look down at the books in my hands feeling silly and stupid and I look up at her again perhaps seeing her for the first time and now I immediately recognize she doesn't have the look of someone I'd approach in the bar but there is something about her and I look at her eyes and hair and lips and skin and breasts and hips and then I sense this isn't the way to treat someone who is trying to help me or maybe anyone at all and I start to feel embarrassed or is it shame and I notice that I've pulled your stomach in ... and I wonder: is this the beginning of body consciousness? And then I connect with her eyes once more this time feeling from her and within my self an openness and she says something and I don't quite hear her and I say "pardon?" and she says – "oh get the "Soulful Sex" book I thought parts of it were quite good, it really opened a door for me and my husband" and then she glances to one side for a moment and he appears, her husband and *he gathers the context immediately* and says with a quiet humor – "ya – don't get that 'Kama Sutra', I just felt intimated" and then a simultaneous goodbye and good-luck and they moved out of view.

I feel badly for objectifying this human being and also sad that I have no one in my life like her or I'm not as well adjusted as I think he is and I wonder about that for a second: *how did this guy get so self actualized?* and maybe I should ask him because this is what I want, it's what I'm looking for and if he could tell me – God it would just save me so much reading time, not to mention money on books and I wouldn't have to do it all by myself and I can get this actualizing thing over and done with because I don't really believe I *can do* it all by myself and again I want a smoke. I decide to get the "Soulful Sex" book mostly because it makes me feel a connection with her and I put back the "Kama Sutra" and wait for a few minutes because I've also decided: I *don't* want to engage with that couple again and wreck an almost perfect moment.

And then I move to the counter and pay for the book and they give me a little stamp card, that will help me with a discount one day, after I buy so many books and I can't actually imagine *ever reading* that many books but I put it in my wallet anyway because hey you never know and I don't want to offend the sales person. And they ask me if I'd like a bag and I say "no thanks" because I want to do my share in saving the environment and as I leave the store I see that couple again and they're getting into their car across the street ...it's a Miata and it's parked directly in front of mine. This is beyond coincidence and I'm certain this is a message telling me to go and talk to this guy and ask him that question, maybe God is giving me a second chance here, I may never see him again, so I dash

across the street, my heart pounding in my throat, I notice I'm not breathing and I tell myself to "calm down" and I tap on my thymus and rap on the drivers side window and it rolls down ... and it's her, she's driving the Miata and I can't *imagine* what could be wrong with him and I feel deeply confused for a moment but I know it would be incredibly rude and stupid to walk around to the other side so I bend down to the window and they are both waiting there expectantly. I smell her perfume and I feel an overwhelming desire to kiss her on the mouth and I feel my head start to tilt forward and I immediately resist and pull back and I hear my voice shake as I say "thanks for the recommendation, I did get that 'Soulful Sex' book – bye" and as I head towards my car, I start to get that old familiar feeling of incompetence washing over me. I get in the car and throw the book on the passenger seat and I light up a smoke and after a minute a small voice breaks through, telling me that in my own way this book did jump out at me and maybe it is a voice from God... my hands move toward the book and I pick it up and start to read...

And I start to recognize that I have always had more than one voice, I've just never really listened much to the one that takes me away from my comfort and I remember my battles with exercise and my closet full of various AB machines that I ordered from infomercials and then giving my self *permission* not to exercise because I don't *really* want to and when my comfort activities moved me towards a discomfort in my body like when I can't wear my favorite jeans, shorts

and dress pants anymore because the buttons and snaps have only a few threads left to freedom and so *now* I have to buy a bunch of new clothes when the ones I have are perfectly good ... and *I know* no woman will ever want to be in relationship with me with my stomach hanging out like this.

Then my rage kicks in...my self loathing and motivates me *again* to exercise or maybe diet so I cut down on food but not alcohol and cigarettes - trying to find the right balance that will give me everything I need without losing to much of what I already have...

and I think maybe I can change, maybe there is a way to feel fulfilled and happy and connect with a passion for life and I start to feel some courage to do something but I don't know what and as I begin my drive home, I listen to yourself for the first time, raging at the SUV that blocks my view as he pulls into the perfect car length space between me and the car in front and I notice how I are *weaving* in and out of lanes and *winning* on yellow lights.

And I feel quite strongly that I would drive more calmly if I *had* a Jaguar or Mercedes instead of a Hyundai because the ride would be smoother and I wouldn't mind going slower in that situation.

And I hear my self asking God ... "Why?...why?"

“Why is there always construction no matter where I go or what time it is in this damn city and I get no answer except from the slow/stop sign that is being waved in my face by those power hungry men and women who are smirking on the inside as they control my every move and now I’m on West Georgia heading for the Lions Gate Bridge and it’s one lane going the wrong way and backed up to *Bute* – I notice my chest is pounding with *outrage* at the injustice and I feel I could *kill* the “yield its the law” bus driver who merges one of those *ridiculous* looking advertisement buses in front of me.

And I look over at the car next to me and there is a little girl laughing and playing with her sister and a little voice says...“yes” (*hold short silence*)

And I arrive home exhausted, determined to do something but not knowing what or how I grab a whisky and some triscuits and cheese and some ripple potato chips and sit in front of the television and I start to feel better and I know that I’ve got a rerun of Will and Grace, Seinfeld, The Daily Show and Everybody Loves Raymond taped from last night and I would like to laugh and as I turn the TV on...for a moment there’s a commercial for the Foster Parents Plan - \$29/month and I press play on the VCR and then press stop quickly because I want to get that telephone number on the screen because maybe this is a way to change, you know by giving, but I’m too late, the ad is over and yet I feel better for trying and press play again.

And I really enjoy my whisky and the ripple chips and triscuits and cheese and as I light up a smoke I wonder why these moments are the moments I enjoy most in life, more than being with people, even friends and I think about the women at Banyan and I know they would never put up with this kind of lifestyle. They want a guy who is *engaged* with life: rides a bike or kayaks or something. I think about that couple at Banyan too and wish that she was in my life but I know that if she really knew me she would never have talked with me in the first place.

And yet women do approach me, they like the way I hug. they think I'm a cuddly teddy bear and they feel so safe, of course all these projections I go along with co-creating the lie that I am one of the good guys.

And as I'm marking in this week's TV guide what shows to watch and tape, I wonder if I'm wasting my life...and I know that something is wrong.

And I remember that I've been feeling so much fear lately, fear from the moment I get up in the morning until the moment I go to bed, even in my dreams, I have fear and a voice says this fear is supposed to be with me guiding me like a friend, showing me the way home to my self and another voice says "no that's not right" and again I feel confused. And I remember seeing that film "Extremes" at the Canada Place Imax - it was all about fear in a way - very athletic types who have mastered a particular sport like heli-skiing or frozen water-fall climbing – whatever - all breathtaking stuff and I wondered how they could have so much

courage and one of them talked about fear and said it was crucial for them and how it helped them to concentrate and focus in the moment.

But I intuitively knew that these were healthy people talking about healthy fear like the fear that I need walking down a dark alley in Mexico at night. No one actually talked about the fear that stops me from doing things: like going to Mexico in the first place or answering the phone or getting out of bed in the morning.

And I realize I *am* afraid in almost every situation and I remember coming to and from the Playhouse Theatre, all those homeless panhandling folks standing outside the doors who are clearly strategizing to get my money or the apparently hard of hearing or deaf squeegee folks who seem quite happy to go ahead squeegeeing your windshield even when you've ask them to stop. And a small part of me that is *not* afraid that I'm being manipulated or taken advantage of *actually* wants to *give* them some money, but I know I *am* afraid so I avoid them, walk around them, avoid eye contact with them and I wonder if that cast is real and do they dress up that way just for effect, cause I know I've seen these exact same homeless people in these exact same spots and I wonder if there's some kind of elaborate con going on. After I've escaped I start thinking about volunteering in a soup kitchen or doing some other kind of selfless service in the community.

I'm even afraid to pick up the phone now with *all* the calls, for very *worthwhile* causes like cancer, MS and sending kids with a disability to summer camp or the circus but it irritates me that they all call at the same time every day – between 5 and 7 PM – 7 days a week - all these nice young folks reading the script that they've been trained to read and they always starts off in the same way, with an apparently sincere appreciation for the donation that I made last year and they go on and on and I know what's coming and I'm afraid of how much of a donation they'll ask for and I wonder how strong my boundaries are today and can I say "no" and I'm not quite sure these folks are even breathing because there's not even a nanosecond of opportunity to interject a word into their extensive spiel and of course I'm waiting for the inevitable last line:

"...so if you could help us again this year it will really make a big difference" and if I say for whatever legitimate reason I have – "no" – then they *scroll* down to that other paragraph on their script that starts with "well sir I should let you know that this year is especially important and they sound so convincing.

But I know they're not listening to me and that they don't really care about me or what my situation is: maybe I'm out of work and I wonder if I could ask them for their telephone number and call them back - call them up between 5 and 7 PM – 7 days a week and ask them for money for you know, some new clothes or maybe some books from Banyan.

And I wonder maybe I should tell them how I'm feeling and that I felt talked at and not engaged in a real conversation but I don't say anything and I hear my self pledging \$25 – not as much as they wanted but more than what I wanted.

So then what I do is I get one of those "Caller ID" things, because it actually helps me control my fear but the problem is that I don't even want my friends to know that I have one because then they'll think I'm home but choosing not to talk with them which is probably true and anyway I can't resist demonstrating my psychic superiority as I let them know that *I know* who they are when they call.

And as I light up a smoke I know that what fills me with the most fear is when I start to seriously consider the possibility that maybe I should quit smoking.

And then I start to worry about all my compulsiveness and addictions and need for comfort – comfort and how entertained I need to be – how engaged I need to be and I wonder if I really know my self and do any of us really know ourselves and there's that question again – "what is this self of selves we are to know anyway?"

And how can we know the essence of our own being with all the distraction and perhaps it is best to just live in a cave somewhere and try to connect to whatever and sometimes I wish I were a First Nations person ... I remember, I watched a

movie one time about a vision quest and there was a moment in the film when the answer to this kind of question came to the main character and sometimes I think that maybe I should find a religion or spiritual practice because some of them have their *moments* that also create awakening and awareness ... and I wonder if I *could* stop being self-conscious for any near as long as a *moment*.

and I have an overwhelming feeling of being ... unsatisfied.

and then I remember my good buddies: Bob, Mark, and Kelly especially, friends who were just like me and then they changed all of a sudden: they quit smoking and drinking and at least active womanizing and turned to exercising and self help books, and therapy – every kind of therapy: narrative therapy, solution based therapy, thought field therapy, art therapy, process based therapy, brief therapy, deep therapy and body centered psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, drama therapy and group therapy and after all was said and done that none of them became happy or anything. But still they didn't come back to the once shared lifestyle, they didn't seem to need it anymore but really when Bob started to ride bikes and kayak – there just wasn't anything left to talk about.

And Mark was always giving me his used self help books and affirmation stickers, affirmation stickers that I stuck all over the apartment. There were so many on the bathroom mirror I couldn't shave without cutting my self. The fridge

was a jungle of magnets with a thousand of these things on there that I never read when I opened the door to get the fudgcicles.

And Kelley was always trying to get me to be still and find a way to my self by just sitting and meditating and *I knew* that this would never work because the one belief I have that has kept me going through all of these years is how important it is to *move* and keep *moving* or else you die inside and then there's nothing left and nowhere to go or anything to do that will be meaningful or satisfying or important in any way and Kelley calls this distraction and I don't believe him because this is me – it's who I am – I'm a doer and *I know* this is true: that I need to keep moving *relentlessly* like a shark and get things done.

And I do *do* things and accomplish things sometimes many things at the same time: I never go anywhere without a minimum of having two stops to make or two tasks to accomplish – I don't go to the mail box without going to the store I don't return a video without getting gas or going to the insta-bank and I certainly don't go over either North Shore bridges without coordinating some combination of doctor, dentist and massage and physio appointments.

And *I know* this is all about winning and how much I love to win and not just in traffic although that's when I see it most clearly. And I know how much needing to win feeds every aspect of my life but I love I love getting a ride to the airport

instead of a paying for a taxi, finding time left on a parking meter, breaking up with my girlfriend in time for the weekend – or better yet just before her birthday - having my morning bowel movement at work while I'm being paid, getting 2 for 1 coupons to movies or videos, not being home at Halloween, having friends or family out of town at Christmas so there's fewer presents to buy. And *you know* there's a high price to pay when you lose: missing lower gas prices by a day, leaving the city on a holiday or something, returning to the rain and finding out from your best friend that "it was sunny every day while you were gone", renting a movie that's shown on television the next week, getting perfectly snuggled in bed and then hearing the whine of a mosquito, the drip of a faucet drip or feel the pressure to pee, forgetting to buy something you need at the store, of course I refuse to make a list – unless it's a coupon list – having the coupons in my pocket that I can pull out to remind me what to buy. But the problem is that sometimes I misunderstand the details on the coupon like the expiry dates or get the Safeway and Save-On coupons mixed up – there are so many ways to lose. Of course the *ultimate* winning is winning money in some way - because *winning really* is the basis of our entire lives.

I went to buy a *loveseat* at the "BRICK" – it was on sale – now I've have already anguished about the fact that the 2 seat love seat is only \$50 less than the 3 seat sofa and I've returned home and re-measured and measured to ensure that the sofa will just about fit nicely into the TV room, you can't quite close the door but I

never close that door anyway, so I decide to buy the sofa and I have just signed the MasterCard slip and the sales person comes back to me and asks “oh by the way have you heard about the BCTV promotional sale?” “No” I says, my heart beginning to speed up a little bit, “what promotional sale might that be?” He says “well it’s called the 69 cent sale, you go and give BCTV 69cents and they give you a \$1.00 coupon that you can spend right here at the BRICK, each person can buy up to \$1,000 worth of coupons for \$690.00. - you save 310bucks” – I said “Ok – sign me up”and they promised to apply the discount to my bill the next day when I brought in the coupons.

So I’m excited and I’ve got to do this and so the first thing I have to do is I have to arrange coverage for me at work and 10 – 15 calls later it’s done then I think why can’t I give Kelley, Mark or Bob \$690 and one of them can come with me and also buy *for* me another \$1000.00 worth of coupons and then I could save \$620.00 – not to mention the advantage of the H.O.V. lane – High Occupancy Vehicle lane - so I approach my good buddies about it and they all get that blurred look in their eyes that they tend to get when I start wanting to win and anyway for various lame excuses they’re not coming and then I think why can’t I draft up an authorization letter from maybe Mark lets say authorizing BCTV to give me his coupons and I call BCTV in the morning and they’re ok with this and they did say that no one has ever asked them that question before and Mark’s ok with it too and so I’m all set but I’m worried, I worried that this all works out and I

get there before all the coupons are gone because there's only a limited supply (\$200,000.00) and I'm *imagining* 200 people all lined up first thing in the morning with 690 dollars each and I am one person to late and I'm stressed – I'm stressed because BCTV is way the hell out and gone on Lougheed Hwy and it's Tuesday and for some reason that no one can ever explain to me Second Narrows bridge is always backed up on Tuesday mornings so it's a slow slog to Gagliardi Way and I'm getting more and more anxious by the minute and a little resentful towards my good buddies as I watch the cars speed by me in the H.O.V. lane. But when I get there everything goes smoothly and they give me the 2000 coupons and one of the staff ask –“oh by the way have you heard about the contest?” “no” I says, my heart beginning to speed up a little bit “what contest might that be?” and she says, “well if you want, after you give your coupons to the store they can send them back to us and we draw a winning coupon and that person wins a 1964 Corvette Stingray convertible”. If I want, well I'm excited especially when I consider that I have 2000 coupons in a 200,000 coupon draw, but then I look at the coupons more carefully and there *is clearly a space* for your name and telephone number – I can't believe this – I have to sign my name and telephone # on 2000 coupons and you know, I had to do it, there was almost no choice.

So I saved my \$620 and get my couch delivered and it's so comfortable and as I'm sitting there I kinda wish I had someone to snuggle with you know while I

smoke and drink and watch TV and eat my triscuits and cheese and ripple potato chips and I feel a pang of pain and loss because I *did* have a beautiful relationship one time and I really blew it.

Cheryl Loucks: here was a woman who *loved* me and she was warm and funny and authentic you know, had real substance and I was just so comfortable *in my self* when I was with her and we kind of fell together in our loneliness but that chemistry wasn't there – that in-loveness passion we all crave – and I told her in the beginning – “You're not the one because that chemistry feeling needs to be there *at least* at the beginning if I am going to spend the rest of my life with someone” and we both kind of understood that and we enjoyed each others company so much that I kind of forgot about the chemistry thing most of the time except every once in a while when we made love I felt loss about not feeling that passion and remembering what it was like when I did and I would feel dead inside and think it was from not being in love with her then I would wonder what the heck am I doing with someone I am not in love with and we would break up and then a couple of days, a week later we'd get back together somehow and this cycle repeated itself a few times until one night something happened: I was sitting on the edge of the bed, we had just finished making love and I got up to change the time on the alarm clock and all of a sudden a bolt of pain went driving down to the core of my being and in a flash of a moment I had a series of desperate longings in the following order: I wanted a smoke and a drink and to

stuff my face and to watch TV and to have passion in my love making life. Cheryl and I talked about this and what we figured out was, that these represented a series of addictions and *maybe* my idea of passion was *also* an addiction so then we decided that the next time I felt loss and went dead inside that we would stick it through and see what happened and we did and what happened was ...well I felt loss and went dead inside but with this new consciousness I was able to move through the deadness more quickly and come out the other side - back to loving her again - the disconnection was *not* about *her*, it was about *me* and so we continued on, until one day I was *smitten* – *inflamed* with desire: *every* fiber of my being was saying pursue this woman – Jennifer – although there was this little voice was saying –“no no no no that’s not quite right” but I was overwhelmed by the voice of desire and I did pursue Jen and broke up with Cheryl.

The flame between Jen and I lasted about six months – I remember... Jen always used to say to me, you know, – “why are you working so hard on this relationship? – it’s not like you’re the one”

and so in the end I had no one and everyone I’ve met since then has not been able to hold a candle to the loving heart and beautiful spirit of Cheryl – she moved on of course - met a nice guy, obviously a little more well adjusted than me.

So here I sit on my comfortable couch from the BRICK ... oh I didn't win the 1964 Corvette Stingray convertible by the way and I wonder about that little voice I didn't listen to and wonder what my life would be like now if I had listened to it...so I light up a smoke and think about all this and figure it out because I *do* think better when I *am* smoking and it's scientifically proven you know that smoking actually stimulates brain activity but after a couple of drags I butt it out because sometimes you know, you just get tired of smoking.

And I wonder maybe I should exercise or get some kind of therapy, maybe play therapy, maybe that's the thing I should do to finally get rid of this feeling of sadness or loneliness or whatever it is ... but you know that therapy costs a lot of money so maybe what I'll do first is go back to Banyan Books because after all I do have that discount card I need to fill up. Yes that's what I'll do and I'll go on Tuesday because I have a dentist appointment at Arbutus and 4<sup>th</sup> in Kits so that will work out ok.

Maybe I'll meet someone there in the aisles or maybe another book will jump out at me or maybe I'll hear another little voice saying...“yes”.

*Intermission – optional but recommended*

I did end up going back to Banyan, several times and I didn't hear any more little voices when I was there but I was pleased to discover that I could fill up that discount card in pretty short order cause I bought a lot books, you know on soul and healing and stuff. The titles were so intriguing: The Dance of Anger, The Dance of Intimacy, The Dance of Deception, The Fire from Within, Sitting in the Fire, Fire in the Belly, Care of the Soul, SoulMates, Soul Retrieval, The Healer Within, The Artist Within, The Warrior Within, The Goddess Within, The Kama Sutra and on and on. I ended up needing to buy a couple of new bookcases to hold all of these books and I decided to buy them at IKEA way out in Richmond near the airport because I'd just seen the new catalogue and the Goddess of sales was with me in a 10% off kind of way. The problem was I had a rule or at least a very firm guideline about never actually going to Richmond so I had to wait until the Goddess of multi-tasking made it worth my while and she did, my friend Mark, I owed him at least 2 rides to the airport and he phoned me up one Friday night and asked for a mid morning ride I was able to graciously respond and then on my way back from the airport I detoured over to Ikea, even though I knew once I entered that store I may never find my way out again. I mean they really do need those little feet on the floor or those multi colored directional floor lines that the hospitals have. I'd like to say that the 10% sale made this whole chore worthwhile but when I considered how long it actually took me to put those bookcases together – days not hours – I mean I started off with that 'Allen'

wrench and ended up using a hammer. It really made me wonder if I actually was winning at all.

But the bookcases looked great with all titles and colors and such. I put them side by side right next to the TV –you know - to show that I lived a balanced life. I have to admit you know that I didn't actually read any of those books; I couldn't seem to get around to it, especially considering how quickly movies are being released into videos and DVD's nowadays. But I have been reading a bit of that first book I bought at Banyan, you know "Soulful Sex". I mean, it's been quite a while since I bought it; – it was sitting on my bedside table for over a year, sometimes in the drawer, sometimes under the bed, but always in reach, a voice beckoning me to read it. One time I packed it into my suitcase to take on what you might call a retreat, determined to read the damn thing, you know having spent the money, every once in a while I considered wrapping it up and giving it to a friend for a birthday present and I just about gave it to Kelly last year for Christmas.

But I was glad I didn't – didn't listen to that voice because one day totally unexpectedly Cheryl came over for a visit. I couldn't believe it when I saw her pull up and get out of her car; it was like a dream come true. In that moment, I wondered if she missed me or had forgiven me or wanted to be friends and a voice told me to try and win her back and I may only ever get this one chance, so

this has to be good and then I realized that I was already half way there because I had just showered and if I put on clean clothes there wouldn't be the smell of smoke and my room mate Dennis was away for the weekend – hey you never know what can happen, one more roll in the hay for old time sake. And I just had my parents over for dinner the night before so the place was neat if not sort of clean. It was all starting to come together in my mind and in just a few seconds I had developed a plan, a strategy to win her back. I put Dennis' new running shoes on my side of the hallway, so she'd think I was exercising. I sprayed the room with air freshener so the room would have that "Crisp Breeze" smell, oh and then I moved all the ashtrays into Dennis' room and I turned off the TV and put on a classical background music CD and as I was desperately trying to get the plastic off - I realized this was the last gift she ever gave me before we broke up – How perfect!

I put the kettle on to boil water so that I could say I was just about to have some tea – Cheryl loves tea – I never drank the stuff and certainly never bought it but when my parents came over for dinner my mom brought her favorite after dinner tea "Constant Comment " which happens to be Cheryl's favorite too... and when they left, mom left the tea, so all that was left for me to do to support the "I had changed plan" was not to gag when I drank the stuff. And then I remembered Woody Allen in "Annie Hall" and I strategically re-placed the TV Guide with the

“Soulful Sex” book on the coffee table. I was really in the zone – in the flow – it felt like music you know – well it felt like winning.

I was ready, let the games begin. I opened the door and there she was standing there looking at me, smiling and it was like seeing a part of my self that I hadn't seen for a long time or hadn't noticed was missing and then all of sudden you do see it. Her face was so familiar to me, like a part of me had come home and then I noticed she was watching me in the silence and I wondered what she was thinking and feeling and I knew I wanted her back and I wanted to tell her all that I was feeling and how much a part of me she was, God the fullness in my chest - and it seemed really clear that there was only one possible thing to say in this moment. “Cheryl what a surprise – It's so good to see you – please come in - the place is a mess – I was just about to have some tea?”

So she sees the Soulful Sex book on the coffee table and she said she had bought this very same book about 10 months ago for her and her “partner” “*Doug*”. Could it get any better than this? Apparently *Doug* didn't want to have anything to do with it and that marked the beginning of the end for their relationship.

So she's telling me the story you know about the lack of communication in all aspects of her relationship life with *Doug* and I'm thinking you know that – this is

good – I’m being given a second chance here and I don’t want to blow it and so I lied little and told her that “ya Soulful Sex, what a great book and I’ve been giving it a second read, I found it was hard to read the first time – you know - being alone when I was feeling so much loss for you”. I mean it wasn’t a total lie and I said that out of love.

We ended up having a really great connected engaged conversation and lots of tea and as she was leaving I noticed that it didn’t feel right that she should and as I said “bye” I wondered if my plan had worked at all.

Well it must have because about a month later she ends her relationship with good old *Dougy* boy and we started seeing a bit of each other, going for walks and holding hands and seeing a movie every now and then. I bought some running shoes exactly like Dennis’ and put them on that very same spot in the hall knowing she would eventually ask if I was jogging now and I’d say “oh that I’m trying it out slowly and that I want to find new ways of getting connected to my body;” I had told her I quit smoking because I knew she never liked that about me but man oh man every time I’d go to see her I had to shower and brush my teeth and wear clean clothes, gargle. I couldn’t smoke in the car anymore, which let me tell you was really my last sacred place for smoking. I no longer smoked in my bedroom because it would stink up all my clothes in the closet and then I decided to just have one designated set of clothes for smoking: an old sweat shirt

and a pair of jeans that I was keeping around – it was quite perfect really, I kept them in the dirty clothes hamper. Fortunately my room mate, Dennis, he smoked, so every once in a while if I did have a bit of that smell on me, I had an explanation and I often say to Cheryl that I wished Dennis would find the courage to quit that filthy habit like I did.

At this point I wasn't really worried about the lies because if we did get back together, you know, living together, then I would quit smoking, but really there wasn't much point in quitting then until I knew, you know, that it was going to be worth my while.

Anyway we usually went to her place to talk and have tea, Cheryl didn't want to have sex right away because it had felt too soon for her and at the time I agreed with her because I didn't want to screw this up and as much as I loved her I still didn't feel any huge urges of passion.

The problem was that she wanted to start things off, I mean our love making, in a deeper way, a soulful way she said and she wanted us to read this book together – *Soulful Sex*. Now, I can understand poor Doug's reaction to this book, I mean on the one hand it says "...it's important to be able to say "penis" or "clitoris" or "orgasm" as easily as "toast butter, and jam."

I thought I could get used to that but you know at the beginning of Chapter 6 – Sexual Communication: The Basis of Sexual Bonding – there’s one of those little quotes in italics at the beginning of each chapter that people always find so profound, like it’s guidance or something and this is the part that Cheryl’s reading:

“Unless we are willing to explore the unknown in ourselves and in the other, and in the relations between us, we will never advance very far along the path of love.” - John Welwood.- And then she looked at me like for affirmation or confirmation that we’re both on the same page here, I looked at her, my eyes bugging out of my head with fear.

I mean I almost wish we hadn’t made love – this whole soul God thing – it just stressed me out and a huge voice told me to just go home and light up and watch some of my taped shows but I didn’t know, I mean what was it that was going on, I mean I loved her and yet I just felt so relieved when I got the hell out of there.

I mean I knew what was going on. I had that experience with her about my addictions. And it was a very different experience those few times I was able to stay with the deadness and choose the unknown instead of always following desire. But of course in the end I did follow desire with Jen. And I have to keep reminding my self about that and how badly it turned out and how I felt: it felt like there was a hole inside of me and I had to keep filling it up from the outside and I

have to say I was afraid of that hole – walking around it or being with it or knowing it or understanding it in any way but I have had some successes - I gave up ripple potato chips, I mean I don't buy them anymore. I'll eat them if they're free you know at a party or something or if someone wants to loan me some. I still eat my triscuits and cheese although a while back Cheryl got mad at me when I wouldn't buy the 50% less salt kind but you know they're cost same price as the regular ones and they certainly don't taste as good. I refuse to pay the same money and certainly not more money for products that give you less and less of what you like, less of what you want when you buy the product in the first place.

Dairy's got the right idea: Skim milk has less fat but you pay less for it, this makes sense to me.

I know the dead zone now. I think I kind of always knew about it. I would be feeling some kind of hurt or emptiness or disconnection and I then I would go and numb out with my various choices of comfort and feel better and think that I was connected to my self again. But ah – well in fact, my therapist said I wasn't getting connected again at all I was comforting my self in my disconnection.

Oh yes I'm seeing a therapist now – a woman, which I think is a very good idea.

There are moments of connection with her when I think this is the person I should

be with – Ya me and Tony Soprano. I sense this is more of a fantasy than anything else but I do feel more awake and alive when I'm with her. My therapist thinks I've got a lot of holes and that I do need to know and understand them and when I do that will create a space in me and then the essence within me would fill that space up. It's very confusing. Cheryl thought we should go together as a couple and build a good foundation for relationship, you know, learning how to communicate, how to deal with conflict and anger and resentments and also to build a foundation of intimacy for this soulful love making thing.

Well I didn't want her to come. I mean I'm as honest as I know how to be in therapy and how many times could I tell Cheryl that I don't have this "in-loveness" passion feeling for her without causing some permanent damage and really I had stretched the truth a little bit which of course is why we got back together in the first place because she thought I'd changed. My perception was that I just needed to catch up to my self a little bit ...to allow the time to transform the lies into truth and then one day everything will balance out.

How do you bring God into your love making anyway? I appreciate that maybe it's not always best to be genitally focussed and you know look deeply into each other eyes and begin the beginning of some kind of soulful connection but this whole idea of asking God – *right out loud* - to come into your love making – I can't do it – I just can't do it.

What if it doesn't happen? What if it does happen? I mean that's pretty frightening isn't it? – having God there watching everything – listening to everything - knowing your deepest most inner thoughts. What would that be like? How would that work? I have no idea what that would mean. Well it would probably mean that it was one of those really subtle deep inner energetic experiences that the people at Banyan are always talking about. I hate having to trust that something is supposed to be going on inside me let say and I have no awareness of it, I mean, it's like vitamins isn't it, you never really know if they're working or not working, magnet mattresses, St Johns Wart, royal jelly, green whatever seaweed, Acidophilus and Bifidus, Kelp (help!) – a zillion products – all asking you to trust what you can't see or feel or touch.

I admit I don't eat white bread and I do take Vitamin C but you know all this stuff, it's not like things that you know are working like Compound W or Preparation H.

And even though I loved Cheryl, I still found myself lusting after a certain look or a certain kind of youthful vibrant energy. And I felt a little dishonest but I knew it wasn't the real me – it was just part of my personality – my animal side – my animal soul and it wasn't my fault either because I have been conditioned my whole life by television and the media on what I should desire.

Everyone says that the passion dies with the romance but you know every passionate relationship I've ever been in has ended before the passion was over so I don't actually know what happens to the passion.

Sometimes I think we're lucky because having the passion die in our relationship is not an issue we will ever have to face so maybe we're ahead of the game somehow, on the other hand I think that holding hands is passionate and we never go anywhere without holding hands or touching in some way.

I didn't know what to do, Cheryl was always talking about not wanting to get stuck in life you know in old patterns and such and wanting to be alive, awake, in the moment, on the edge, real, authentic, engage and embrace life you know - live life to its fullest and part of me agrees with that and of course this makes perfect sense and a voice says yes let's honor this gift of life but it's like, it never failed, it always ended up coming back to the same place - the conversation - and I'd keep waiting for it - knowing what's coming - it always ended up coming back to television and the numbing out she experienced and it was like she believed that not watching television would totally change our lives, I mean, Good Grief, what a revolting development that would be. And I wasn't about to stop watching television, this is where I have learned about love and family and relationships and about honesty, justice and integrity and courage. Sure there does seem to be a very strong relationship between my eating and watching TV

but after I finish eating I don't often watch TV and I mean I tape everything anyway, I haven't watched TV in real time for years, yes I am one of the few people who can actually program their VCR and I planned my meals around my taped shows and when I finished eating I'd turn the television off. I admit sometimes I go on eating for hours and hours and hours on end but I don't watch stupid shows, like all these Reality TV shows or soap opera type shows or day time talk shows – except for “Ellen” you might as well watch pro wrestling. No, I watch shows of substance: (*reruns?*) – NYPD Blue and West Wing and Davinci's Inquest, The Eleventh Hour and Judging Amy, Alias, Law and Order – all 3 of them, CSI – all 3 of them and the Sopranos if you can get it – shows that make you feel. I often tear up at some of those special moments of meaningful relationship contact.

Cheryl didn't get it but she was pretty good natured about it although if the first thing I did when I got to her place was turn on the TV – big reaction. Cheryl likes to garden you know and when she's getting ready to go out I'd pretend I was reading and then when she goes out I'd turn the television but I keep an eye out so I wouldn't get caught. Sure I'd feel like a kid but I was totally convinced that if she really knew how much TV I actually watched, she'd leave me.

I know all this pretending was like denying my selfhood and I wasn't really in integrity with my self and every time I'd lied or withheld the truth I'd promise

myself I'd never do that again because it was disrespectful of her and me, but in the moment I never had the courage.

When we finally decided to move in together and she asked me. I didn't actually feel all that ready but you're never ready for anything right? And I didn't want to hurt her feelings, and there was this little voice saying that 'yes' this was the truth, we should be together, even though I didn't feel she had the straight goods on me.

Dennis said how can you start a relationship off with a lie? But he was left to find a new room mate right? Again my point was that the lying got us back together in the first place so now all I had to do was to live up to the lies. I mean that's pretty motivating: to avoid the humiliation of being caught in a lie. I'd just had to use my will.

In the beginning it was difficult, I felt pale and bland, you know, going cold turkey in our home with regards to the smoking. Of course I was hugely cheating on the side. I'd go walks late at night walks, take extra trips to the store, I even paid \$300 to join a health club close to work and there was no special deal on, you know, so I could shower and change before I went home.

The problem was that I started to feel I couldn't truly be myself with her because whenever I was with her I was thinking about the next time I could have a smoke.

My therapist asked me she says "Josh, do you want to be in a healthy relationship or do you want to keep smoking?" I was torn. You know I learned a lot in therapy. I got connected to this deep dissatisfaction I'm always feeling. I learned that I'm always hiding, even from when new experiences I wanted to embrace, I didn't really want to change – not really – not at the core of my being. I refused to let my self be deeply affected and if I did have some kind of even extraordinary experience I couldn't hold on to it. I returned to quickly to this impoverished deadness that colors my life.

I mentioned a retreat earlier, well it was a men's retreat that Bob, Mark and Kelly were going on – it's what you might call - a Process Weekend – you know, where you process your feelings and support each other by listening and not giving advice and not judging and accepting each other as who you are in the moment and there was a native "sweat" every day and the Elder asked if there was anyone new to sweats and it was just me, Bob, Mark and Kelly that were new and he said that he would take it easy on us and laughed a bit. So we all crawled into the lodge on our hands and knees on the dirt and cedar one after the other moving around in a circle. We all had bathing suits on and I was glad there were no women there because of my stomach hanging out. At first it didn't seem so

bad, another fellow brought in these red hot rocks on a pitch fork and piled them in a deep hole at the center of the circle – each rock represented different things – the four directions, the grandmothers and grandfathers, and different animals and such and then the elder passed a pipe with tobacco in it and I thought, here's a religion I could get into and I thought you know if I did quit smoking one day, I would still be able to have my religious pipe rituals without anyone bugging me about it and if they did complain I would be in the position of being able to call them 'religious intolerants' and I kinda liked the idea of that and I made a mental note to check this out later. And then they closed the door flap and it started getting hotter and hotter and to be honest after the first 15 minutes of sweating I wanted to get the hell out of there it was so hot but that little voice again, it said – 'stay' and I did. And I sat there in the heat breathing slowly with short breaths through my mouth, sat there in the circle listening to the voices of prayer and sharing and confession, sat there in the circle listening to what seemed like a never ending sea of voices in the dark, it was so dark you couldn't even see the person sitting next to you even though your knees were touching and my heart was pounding as the sea of voices started to approach me and then it was my turn and I didn't know what to say, I'd been so engrossed in what others were saying and then all this panic filled my chest because I didn't want to embarrass my self and I wanted to say something that was real or at least appeared to be real and then I wondered if I even knew *how* to be real. But then when I started to speak, a wave of truth rose up in me and my panic left me and I forgot about how

hot it was, I forgot about how uncomfortable my back was sitting cross-legged on the earth and it felt like I was speaking the truth for the first time in my life and in this moment I knew I was connected to my essence, I knew it and I felt a filthy film that covered me wash away and I surprised myself a little when I said “I’m lost and I don’t know what to do – where to go – and I’m frighten, please help me” and then I just sat there with all my pain.*(pause)* And there was no where to go - nothing to distract me – nothing to do except just sit there and feel it – and I did. *(hold long silence)*

After 3 days of sweating and bonding, my heart was opened. I felt huge love and compassion for these guys and Kelly – I never knew he had so much pain, later on I hugged him and told him that I loved him and we both cried. It was a beautiful moment. And I wanted to run home to tell Cheryl about all this and love her the way she deserves to be loved, I wanted to change, I was changed, transformed even, but then the further away from the retreat location I got something started to seep away from me like there was no bottom in me and I urgently wanted to fill it up again and I immediately started to think about what shows I’d been taping over the last 3 days and what I would eat while I watched these shows and wondered about the next time Cheryl would be out of the house or in the garden and then all the open hearted ideas of things started to change to the old reality of things and by the time I got home I had lost my connection to this love and openness and I started to feel bland and I don’t know kind of pale

and I was angry too that I went through so much on this weekend only to lose it so quickly - what a jip.

Of course Cheryl was waiting and really interested in hearing about my experience and I shut out the voice that said look at her loving face, she loves you so much and I thought, she's hopeful for her own self interest, she wants me to have changed, she wants me to be the way she wants me to be, you know, without TV and all this resentment came up in me about how it was her fault that I couldn't be me and how it was her fault that I felt so uncomfortable with my self all the time and I then told her (*with increasing anger*) "I'm still smoking and that I lied to you and I had never been jogging and had no intention to and that I loved eating and watching TV and that's just who I am right now." And I was angry and yelling at her and then I stopped, I was out of breath and I was sobbing and then these images of my mother started swirling around in my head and I thought oh no I've hurt mom and she has done nothing to deserve this and what must she think of me and then another image of a an infant screaming in a crib wanting to be picked up and in that image a moment of a choice between anger and giving up and then my anger started to rise in me and then I looked at Cheryl and I saw her clearly for the first time and I said "you're not my mother" and her eyes were filled with tears and she looked straight into my heart and she said – "thank you for the truth – I've been waiting for you to trust me" and at that moment I knew I'd

never been loved like this and felt her compassion for me and I did trust her – trusted her not to hurt me. (*hold silence*)

Then I knew we were ok. And all the love I had for her came back to me and all the open hearted connectedness I had at the weekend flooded back to me and my heart was opened and felt spacious and expanded and I knew - that - was the secret or at least part of the secret – keeping an open heart.

Later I learned that this kind of communicative intimacy was covered in Chapter 7 of *Soulful Sex* –“Powerful Tools for Passionate Bonding”.

But what was this thing with my mother – I mean I wasn’t abused – sure she was a Dr. Spock mom – you know – never pick up kids when they cry and all that but she clearly loved me and loves me. Of course my parents always like to tell the story about how they took the wrong baby home from the hospital but all babies look alike right? The nurse handed this bundle in a blue blanket to my mom, apparently it had the same coloring as me and away they went. A few hours later my mom noticed the wrong name on the hospital wrist band so back they went to the hospital – they were told to sneak up the back way so the other mom wouldn’t find out – can you imagine. And then they did the big switcharoo. We always laugh so much when they tell that story.

Another time mom told me that when I was just about one, I got pneumonia and they had to put me in hospital for 10 days in one of those tent things and apparently I screamed so much when she was leaving that they told her not to come back and she didn't. I could see the hurt in her eyes as she told me this story, that she had acquiesced to authority, you know, back then and left her baby with strangers for that long. I still have some memories of that: images, fear, rectal thermometers.

And as I was still feeling this expansiveness and spaciousness in my heart I started to recognize you know that maybe I am more than my personality, maybe there is a more real me, a more essential being that wants to fully manifest and that this voice of truth and I sense, a voice of longing is really all the aspects of my essence wanting to be realized. And I thought what kind of game having I been playing with my self, what kind of self deception is this and then I felt this fear in my gut wanting to rise up and speak "wait a minute – wait a minute – what about all of my comforts – stop this inquiry please." But I didn't - I kept my heart open and a little voice said that maybe there is another kind of comfort – the comfort of loving the Truth. (*short silence*)

Now what do I do and this is a good question right, just because one part of you knows something, it doesn't mean the rest of you will go along and I'm not stupid and I know I can't change overnight so I asked Cheryl for her support and of

course she's just thrilled. And I immediately had to add "wait a minute, wait a minute this doesn't mean I'm going to stop watching television and it certainly doesn't mean I'm going to quit smoking. I not going to hide it anymore. I became what you might call a conscious smoker, you know, someone who is psychologically *aware* of *when* and *why* they are lighting up, which was pretty easy to do considering whenever I did light one up everyone in the immediate vicinity turned their head to glare. Anyway I knew that the first thing to do was to try somehow to be more my self and to release my self a little bit from this wonderful reactive personality of mine.

But as much as I loved Cheryl and I couldn't be doing any of this changing without her, whenever I'd see a Miada go by, I'd look to see if that woman was driving and I noticed I'd always be checking out the aisles at Banyan whenever I was there.

My God, when was the last time I sat still and listened to myself and allowed anything to arise in me or emerge from me. It suddenly seemed impossible to be this person I am now and be happy. The person I am now is unhappy. For years and years I've wanted to stay exactly the way I am and somehow get to be happy. This hasn't worked. I knew I had to change.

So we sat down on the comfortable couch from the Brick in front of the TV and didn't turn it on and we just sat there with our eyes closed and we didn't say anything for the longest time and we just sat there holding hands like we always do, just sat there being quiet and it felt good to give my mind a rest and to feel her hand in mine and I started to sense the rest of my body from my toes on up and it kinda of got a feeling of a strength and the expansiveness in my chest increased and I wondered what that energy was about. And I felt like maybe I'd been down one of those dark holes and I don't know, somehow had created a space and the essence within me had filled that space up – and it felt good. It wasn't a huge blissful thing, it was just I think, a more real me. Yes, I was having a moment of the authentic self and I knew it, I knew it was true and that voice again, not so little – louder now – and as I breathed it in deeply and let it out, I remembered the little girls playing in the car that day and the 'knowing' that came to me then and that I could touch now with each breath. And I didn't want to do anything to disturb this authentic moment and then a little voice said "don't cling on - let it go" and I did, I let it go and in the next moment there was something else there even more beautiful to take it's place and I knew I had to let that go too. Then I had a thought that "Gee I'm feeling pretty good right now" and then this other huge voice sneaks in reminding me of how many holes I have and that it's a long hard road without comfort and that the Truth isn't always comforting. And I wondered if I actually did love the Truth for its own sake at all or did I just like the good feeling that I got and that's right: the Truth is not the same as

happiness. And then there was this wisp - a wisp of a whisper – a wisp of a whisper that said that maybe happiness is not really what I'm after – after all.

*(hold silence)*

The VCR started to whine and I remembered what show I was taping and I felt better. I squeezed Cheryl's hand and got up and went outside on the porch. And as I lit up a smoke I knew I was changing and I felt..... hope.

End

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