(Sandra’s Coffin)

I got a phone call last night. After picking up the phone and hearing the voice on the other side, old memories came rushing back. Yes, it was Collin. I heard his voice after almost 35 years. He called me to tell me about Sandy’s sad demise. He called me for her funeral today.

After I got to the funeral he told me about how Sandra was fighting cancer for the last few years. He also told me about Jack. “Jack? Who is that, Collin?”

“Your 23-year-old son, Mark. I am sorry, but Sandy told me not to tell you about this.”

He told me that Sandra was in touch with him since the last 5 years here in San Francisco, where it all began. She also made him promise her that he wouldn’t tell me about her existence.

This brought tears to my eyes. Just then I saw a boy putting flowers on Sandra’s coffin. I was astonished seeing him. He looked exactly as I did when I was in my twenties. The same eyes, same hair, the same nose. After a while he came up to me and gave me a letter, saying, “Mom left this behind for you.”

There were tears in my eyes after reading that 12-page-long letter. Sandra had written that letter to me during the last few days of her life. In the letter she mentioned the reason for leaving me in Alabama without saying goodbye. She said that Henry had blackmailed her into going with him and that he would kill me if she didn’t. After a month she realized that she was carrying my child. She had also mentioned the hardships she had gone through bringing up our son and why she couldn’t come back.

I broke down after reading the letter. The same boy had walked up to me. I knew now who he was. He wiped my tears and said, “Mom hasn’t told me anything about you. I want to know who you are. I want to know your past. Can you please tell me how it all started?”

“You really want to know who I am and how it started? Ok, I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you everything. It all started here, the same very place we are in San Francisco.”

 (San Francisco 1968)

It was the summer of 1967. I was 18 and I had just graduated from high school that year. It was time for me to move out. In a place like the United States once you are 18 you got to get out into the real world and fend for yourself. I was really confused about what to do after high school. Even though I had got good grades back in school, I couldn’t make up my mind.

Besides, it was also the time of the “Sixties”. This was an era of revolution back in the United States. It was the time of the “Counterculture”, as they call it. A cultural movement that mainly developed in the United States and England and spread throughout much of the western world during the’60s till the mid 70’s.

This was a time in the United States where the youth experimented with drugs, there was a sexual revolution, the Hippie culture came into being, kids dropped out of schools and colleges, travelled around and tripped on various recreational drugs like marijuana, LSD etc and moreover the huge influence of music that was created back then.

I wasn’t very different from most of the youth back there. I too experimented with life and I too did want to explore my life the unconventional way like most of the youth my age did.

I still remember the day I was moving out. I and my childhood friend Collin had decided to leave Texas and move to San Francisco for that summer. It was a sunny morning. All I had was my huge knapsack with my clothes and other belongings in it and by favorite Gibson Guitar that my dad had gifted me that year.

As I was about to leave, I saw something very strange in my mother’s eyes. She was very different that day. She hugged me and all she said was “Son, take care of yourself and I’ll miss you. The next time you come back home, please get rid of that long hair. ”

It was an emotional moment. On the other hand, my dad wasn’t a very emotional person. He didn’t even hug me before I left.

All he said was, “Take care Marcus”. I could make out he was still upset with me for not applying to law school that year. He knew why I wanted a break for a year, but I promised him that I would come back and apply to law school.

Collin had a battered 1960 Corvette Convertible. So, all we had was 200 dollars, Collin’s battered convertible and 3 ounces of marijuana for our journey to San Francisco. We thought after reaching there we’ll get a job and at least try and work our expenses out.

San Francisco was known as “The Summer of Love”. Back then over 100,000 youth had come to the Haights. Hundreds of reporters, movie makers, FBI agents, undercover police officers, drug addicts, and about 100,000 or more tourists to watch them all.

Collin and I had a great time for the first few months. We did part-time jobs like washing cars, working in gas stations, cleaning dishes. The money we made then was enough for us to support the lifestyle that we led. I had come across a number of women back there, but I wasn’t inclined towards anything serious.

9 months had passed and our lifestyle was still the same; we would get up in the afternoon, work for about 5 hours during the day, and get high in the evenings with our social circle and have fun. I had made a lot of new friends there. Suddenly Collin and I had a huge social circle to manage.

One evening, Collin’s new girlfriend, Annette, had invited us over for dinner. I wasn’t in the mood of stepping out that day. I wanted to take it easy because I had really gone wild the night before and had a bad hangover. Moreover, Annette insisted and forced me to bring my guitar and make the evening special. So, we left for Annette’s. As soon as we reached, the first thing I noticed was this tall, beautiful blonde girl in a blue skirt with brown boots standing there. I felt a weird  (Marcus and Sandra Back in 1968)

adrenaline rush through my veins. I was immediately attracted to her. After a while I saw her standing there alone, I walked up to her and said: “Can I get you something to drink? She replied with a dazzling smile, “Ya sure, a beer would be fine.”

So I went to the bar and got her one. After that we started talking and knowing things about each other. She told me she was a member of a hippie group and all she did was travel, trip and have a good time.

Annette came up to me and said: “Marcus, can u start playing that sixth string that you got and charm the beautiful women around here.”

“Your wish is my command, princess,” I replied.

I played all evening. The evening had come to an end and I hadn’t even asked her her name. I was curiously looking for her and she was no where to be seen. Someone patted by shoulder and I turned around. There she was looking straight into my eyes. “Were you looking for me”?

“Hell, ya. I had forgotten to ask you your name”.

She smiled and said, “Sandra,” and left a crumpled page in my hand. When I opened it the page had her address and phone number.

The next day I couldn’t control my emotions and I called her. We met at her place. She stayed with a couple of friends. As soon as I entered her house the living room was smelling of pot and there was smoke all around. So when I got there I had got talking with her and her friends and smoked a few joints with them. After a while we had headed off to the beach. We sat there talking. I was just looking at her and thought to myself that she was the perfect one for me.



She’s was the girl whom I had always dreamt of. After a few days, she said she was moving to California. I was stunned. I did not want her to leave. I was finally enjoying something in life and there was finally somebody who I actually had feelings for.

I decided not to waste time. I held her hand and said “You’ve changed me as a person. I can’t imagine myself without you anymore. I really have fallen for you.”

She was astonished for a minute and then she replied with a very serious look on her face, “I was waiting for this moment. What took you so long”?

That was it. We had taken it from there. This was a new beginning in my life. I finally had someone who I thought was perfect for me. I soon became a part of the hippie group that she was in. Soon Collin and Annette had also joined in. All we did was travel around United States, listen to psychedelic rock, embraced the sexual revolution, and used marijuana and LSD to explore alternative states of consciousness.

Two years had passed since then. I had written a letter to my parents and told them not to worry about me and I also said I needed some more time. I didn’t tell them where I was and what I was doing.

It was finally the summer of 1969. “Woodstock” was just around the corner. Since I had a passion for music, I really wanted to be a part of it. “Woodstock” was the buzz of the town. It was



an event that was one of its kinds then. The United States had never witnessed anything like that before. So we were busy making our preparations for that trip. We were 25 of us that were supposed to go together and we had 8 cars.

Woodstock was just two days away. So we packed our bags and were all set to drive to Bethel, New York where the event was to take place. Annette, Sandra, Collin and I got into the Corvette Convertible and drove down to Bethel.

Woodstock Music & Art Fair was basically a music festival, billed as "An Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace & Music". It was held at Max Yasgur's 600-acre dairy farm near the hamlet of White Lake in the town of Bethel, New York, from August 15 to August 18, 1969.

Once we reached there we couldn’t believe what we saw. We had heard that there were only 50,000 to 100,000 people that were supposed to attend the festival. But to our surprise more than 500,000 people had landed up and they had to make the concert free for everyone. All of us were already high and tripping on various drugs. More than 80% of the people attending the concert were the youth.

Finally, the concert had started. “Richie Havens” had opened the show. His insane performance had proved that one acoustic guitar can bring the world down. There were numerous performances by various artists such as Santana, Jefferson Airplane, Ten Years After. Eventually Jimi Hendrix was supposed to close the show, but there were endless delays. On day 3, Hendrix came out in the middle and again proved what “insanity at its peak” can be. His performance was by far one of the best in

  “Woodstock”.

Woodstock was a very different experience for me. It opened my mind to looking at life differently. It marked the height of peaceful counterculture revolution; I had learnt a lot about life after attending this concert. I had interacted with a number of people there as well. That’s the time I actually realized that every human being is different and one should also handle situations from someone else’s point of view at times. The influence of Woodstock 1969 undoubtedly shaped American culture forever. A year later a Documentary Movie of Woodstock had also released.

Another year had passed. It was 1970. Collin, Annete, Sandra and I wanted to shift base to explore new things. So we shifted to Florida, leaving behind our “Hippie Group”. We told them we would be back in a couple of months as planned. Once we reached Florida we had experienced a few changes. Sandra and I had moved in. Sandra was now my responsibility. Life wasn’t as easy as it was in San Francisco. We were short of money. Sandra had a friend Brian down there in Florida who she introduced us to. He was a drug dealer. He told us to join in. He told us all we had to do was get him as many customers as we could and he would pay us a good commission in return.

As we got back I looked at Sandra unwillingly. She immediately said: “Honey, don’t worry. It will all be fine. Trust me”.

But Sandy, don’t you think it’s risky?”

No honey, its o.k. I know a lot of people who do this and to be honest, beggars can’t be choosers.

This comment from Sandra really made me think. So I took Collin along with me and we had decided to do this together. Days had passed, we kept on getting more and more customers and making a lot of money for Brian. He also gave us our share. I was making enough money for Sandra and me to support our lifestyle.

Just then Collin had come to me: “Mark are you interested in playing at “The Old Blues Oak Bar” thrice a week. They need a guitarist”.

“Ya sure ,but how much will they pay me”.

“60 dollars a night.”

I was more than thrilled. I anyways had money coming in from working with Brian and this was more like a bonus income. Moreover, I also had a chance of showcasing my love for music on stage. Without any hesitation I agreed.

Months had passed. Life was becoming hectic. Brian had started putting more pressure on me to get him more customers. Apart from that I had started playing 5 days a week in different bars, but I still wasn’t happy with the money I was making. Apart from this, Sandra’s addiction towards “Cocaine” had started to increase. She had started snorting almost 5grams of cocaine a day. More than half of what I would earn a month would go into buying drugs for her. I wasn’t worried about the money I was spending for her drugs, but what worried me was the change in her that I had started to notice.

Sandy wasn’t the same any more. She had become short tempered and if she didn’t have anything her way she would start getting violent and abusive. One evening when I got back home after jamming with the band. I saw the house completely messed up. The television was on the floor, the sofa set was upside down, the curtains were torn. In other words, the house was in a complete mess. I was worried about Sandra. I just hoped that she was fine. When I walked into the bedroom I saw her leaning against the wall howling.

I asked her, “What happened baby. Are you alright? Did somebody enter the house and try to attack you”?

But she didn’t reply. After a while she asked me to go and get her some cocaine. “I need some coke desperately, honey. Please go to Collin’s place and get me some”.

I had then started to realize that it was Sandra who had messed everything up at home. She had started to get withdrawal symptoms.

“Sandy, this drug is destroying you completely. I love you and I want you to get rid of this terrible habit.”

She kept pleading with me to go and get her some cocaine, but I resisted. After a while she got violent and started throwing all the utensils out of the kitchen. When I walked in to stop her, she threw the frying pan at me. I ducked. Then I finally managed to stop her somehow. After she had gone off to sleep. I couldn’t sleep the entire night. I was thinking about what I could do to save Sandy from drowning like this.

The next morning Sandra woke up. She apologized and hugged me. She said “I’m sorry Mark. I promise you I’ll try as hard as I can to get rid of doing drugs”. I hugged her. I felt slightly relieved. I knew that Sandra was at least trying to make an effort to change. That day a thought had occurred to my mind. I was thinking to discontinue working for Brian. After seeing what Sandra was going through I didn’t feel like selling the same poison destroying the life of millions. So I called up Collin and told him to meet me for a drink at “The Old Blues Oak Bar”. Collin arrived. We got talking. But Collin could make out that there was something wrong. He knew me. After all he knew me since we were seven.

Then with a smirk on his face he asked “What’s wrong Mark”?

“Nothing, Collin I’m fine”

“Oh! Come on Mark, I know you for years. Now tell me what’s wrong?”

I looked at him and said, “Collin, I really don’t want to do this anymore”

“Do what Mark?”

“I don’t think we should work for Brian anymore.”

”What’s wrong with you Mark? Have you lost it?”

“No Collin, I think this isn’t the right think to do,” I said.

After that I finally told Collin about whatever Sandra was going through. Collin understood. But then Collin said that I didn’t have any other option. Working for Brian gave us a lot of money and no other job would give me more money. Moreover I had just finished school, I didn’t even have a university degree that could give me a good job that would pay well. So I had an idea. I told Collin to join in. Since I had been working for Brian for about a year I had made my contacts in the business. I knew the people that I had to deal with. I knew all the suppliers and I had enough customers. So I told Collin to join me. I had decided to strike one big deal that would give me enough money to survive for a year and after that I would leave Florida with Sandra and settle down somewhere else. I had decided to work for myself instead of Brian using the same suppliers that Brian used and I had a number of customers that had dealt with me and that needed stuff every now and then. So I told Collin to help me. He agreed to do so.

I guess cheating Brian was the biggest mistake I had made at that time. But I didn’t think about the consequences at that time. Frankly, I didn’t have any other option so I did what I thought was best for me at that time. I met a few suppliers that Brian had dealt with secretly without anyone knowing. I struck a deal with seven to eight different suppliers so that Brian or anyone else could not suspect me. I had about 75 customers under me that were ready. I had also promised them a lower rate than what I usually charged them. Well I was looking at approximately 80,000 dollars as a earning. That meant I didn’t have to do anything for 2 to 3 years back then. I had also become greedy I guess.

I went back home that evening. Sandra had cooked dinner. Sandra and I had a lovely quiet dinner. I didn’t tell Sandra about what I was doing. I told her that I was going to get a new job and that we would move to Michigan in a few days and start a new life. Sandra was excited and happy about it. I really felt relaxed and thought that things had started falling in place finally. I took out my guitar after dinner and I started playing. After a while I heard the door bell ringing. I thought it might be Collin. As soon as I opened the door I saw 7 to 8 policemen standing outside my door with guns pointing at me. I was busted. They handcuffed me and put me inside the Police car. Sandra came out and just looked at me with those eyes that wanted to say something but couldn’t knew this had shocked her. But this also shook me completely. I didn’t know how the cops actually had any hint that I was involved in this.

Three days later Collin came down to the police station. I asked him “What went wrong? How did they get to know that it was me?” Then Collin told me that Brian had seen me with one of his supplier “Lucas”. So Brian was suspicious about this. He spoke to Lucas and Lucas told him everything about the deal. So apparently Brian had planned it all and he had informed the police about this. I was setup by Brian. God that felt really terrible. I had no words to say.

Collin had spoken to a lawyer and worked things out. The lawyer said he could bail me out but I had to pay a fine of 20000 dollars. I just had 800 dollars as savings. I didn’t know what to do. Collin promised to help me. He had about 8000 dollars. Apart from that he was so kind. He sold off his car to bail me out. Collin was a true friend.

I got out of jail after 3 months. Collin had come to pick me. On the way back home he told me that he was moving to Columbia with Annette. Apparently he had got a job there at a farm and he wanted a change for a while. I felt sad because I’d been with him most of my childhood and we had left home together 5 years back. We had done everything together. Those memories.

Collin was like a brother to me. Then I asked him how Sandra was. Collin kept quiet. I asked him again “How’s Sandy?”

Collin replied by saying, “I’m sorry Mark. I really don’t know where she is. She just took off the same night you got arrested.”.

I was shattered after listening to this. Collin told me to move on. I suddenly found myself nothing. I thought my world was coming to an end. It looked like I had nothing left. It felt like I had lost everything I ever had. A week later Collin and Annette had left for Columbia. I thought that was the last time I ever saw Collin.

I was all alone. I din’t have any money, no friends. That was the first time in the last five years after leaving home I actually missed mom and dad. I cried a lot at that moment. I really missed home that night. But I was scared of going back. I felt ashamed of going back after putting my parents through so much hell. I had just written 3 letters to them in those 5 years of leaving home. I didn’t know how to actually face them. But I didn’t have an option. I had nobody around me and I really missed home. So I decided to go back.

I took the 7 o’clock bus for Texas that evening from the National Florida Bus Station. I reached home after 2 days. As soon as I reached home, I waited for 5 minutes outside the door. I was nervous. I couldn’t even ring the door bell. But then I knew that I had to get done with it and face them. So I rang the bell. After a few seconds my mother opened the door. She froze as soon as she saw me. She was stunned. She probably couldn’t believe what she was seeing at that point of time. Her eyes looked like they were going to pop out of her sockets with her mouth wide open. I



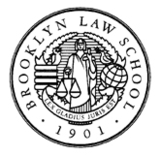
stood there just staring at her for five minutes after which I couldn’t resist myself so I went up to her and hugged her tightly. She hugged me too and said “Just where have you been all this while? Do you know how worried we were? You’ve just written to us three times in these last five years.” I replied with tears in my eyes “I’m sorry mom,” and I just started crying in her lap.

It was a very emotional moment. Probably even more emotional then the first time I had left home 5 years back. After a while my dad got back home from the supermarket. He saw my lying down in moms lap. As soon as he saw me he was shocked. He looked like as if he’d seen a ghost. He was aghast seeing me as soon as I saw him I went up to him and hugged him tightly apologizing for whatever I did. For the first time I saw dad that emotional. He literally had tears in his eyes. He hugged me and said, “I missed you son. Just where did you go? I promise I won’t ever force you for anything but please promise me you won’t ever leave us like this”.

“No dad, I won’t ever I promise you”.

My dad kissed me on my forehead and broke down suddenly. That was the first time I had seen him cry like that. Both my parents were really happy that day after almost five years before I’d left them. That evening was very special. Mom cooked my favorite meal that night. After dinner I got into my room. My room was just the same as I’d left it before. I’d got great night’s sleep that night after a very long time. It felt like I was back to where I actually belong.

A week had passed. I had decided not to waste any time since I’d already lost out 5 years in life.



It was the winter of 1972.I had decided to apply to law school. I wanted to become a lawyer and make my parents proud of me and make up for whatever wrong I’d done in the past. Admissions were open for the winter session that year and to my surprise “Brooklyn Law School” had accepted my application. I had to leave in a week for Brooklyn. Mom and Dad were very happy and relieved that I was finally settling down. At the same time they were a little sad because it had just been a month since I came back and I was going again. But they knew I was going for a good purpose this time and they supported me completely.

Once I reached Brooklyn it was a completely new environment that I was introduced to. Brooklyn was completely different from the places I’d lived in such as Texas, San Francisco and Florida. When I reached law school I noticed that this place would be a completely new experience for me people, the place, the activities, the environment was completely different from what I had experienced in the past. The university consisted of students that wanted to make a serious career and lead a good life. All they would talk about was current affairs, law policies, political issues etc .It was difficult for me to digest stuff like that initially because I’d come from a very different environment that only consisted of” junkies” who never knew about any tomorrow, who never even thought of a career. All they thought of was getting high, travelling and having a good time in life.

About six months down the line I’d adjusted myself to the university environment. I was very busy with all assignments and academic activities. I also had a good time in college. I had made a lot of new friends. But my interests in life had changed. I had started thinking like my peers around me. I was also thinking of making a career and becoming a successful lawyer and doing something constructive in life.

I won’t blame the past that I had because there was a lot of learning from that as well. I had learnt a lot from my past as well .But there was one thought that always haunted me. The thought of Sandra. I was still not over her. I would think about her at times and miss her. Even though I tried I wasn’t being able to forget her. Just then came another phase in my life in the form of “Rachael.”Rachael was beautiful, smart, intelligent, bold and ambitious. She was in my class .My friends used to always tease me about her and they would link us together .I wasn’t very good friends with her initially, but we met each other in class and on campus at times. I had observed that she used to frequently notice me in class, on campus, in the football ground etc. I definitely found her very attractive, but I didn’t think that approaching her at that time was the right move to make. Well to my surprise one night the students of the university had organized a “Ballroom Dance Night.” I didn’t have a partner to dance with that night. But I still went down to the party. I was standing next to the bar and as usual sipping my favorite red wine. Hats when I saw Rachael in this beautiful black dazzling ballroom dance gown. My heart started pumping seeing her. She looked exquisite that night..But surprisingly I saw her standing there all alone.

All her friends went with their partners and she was standing their alone. So I walked up to her: “You are looking really beautiful tonight in that black gown.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t you have a partner to dance with tonight?”

She replied: “No I really don’t. And what about you?”

“Neither do I have a partner.”

After that she asked me for a dance. I was really overjoyed. We danced that night lost into each other’s eyes.

Time just flew and three months down the line we had started dating each other. I thought this would be a way of getting over Sandra and my past. Rachael was very different from what Sandra was. Rachael was beautiful and admirable but at the same time Rachael had a goal in life. She never wasted a single moment in life. She thought life was too precious to b wasted. She was probably one the most intelligent students in our batch. I had learnt a lot from her. She helped me do my assignments, she also would teach me during my exams. She was a very good influence on me. Sandra and Rachael stood poles apart. But it was very difficult for me to judge as to who was right and who was wrong. I guess they both were right in their own way. Rachael always wanted the best for me. She wanted me to graduate with flying colors and become a successful lawyer. She helped me in every possible way she could. At times when I would slip a little from my goals she would pull me back.

Well, four years had gone past. College was nearly to an end. Rachael and me had gone so far into our relationship that we actually had considered marrying each other and settling down. But Rachael only wanted to get married once the both of us had settled down into our careers. She was very forward looking. I guess she was right at that time. So after graduation she had moved over to Washington, D.C where she had got a job in one of the best law firms. I had got a job in law firm in Gleneden, Maryland which wasn’t too far to Washington. It wasn’t the best in the country or anywhere near the firm Rachael worked in but it was decent. We would meet every weekend. Sometimes she would come over and sometimes I would go down to Washington. I was enjoying work in Maryland for the first few months.

But after a while things had suddenly become different. I wasn’t enjoying what I was doing. I would feel strangled working in that law firm. Working day and night on different cases had started taking its effect on me. My efficiency towards work had also started to reduce. My boss would growl at me everyday. This had become an everyday affair. One of my colleagues “Harris” had advised me to look for a job in another law firm. But I think I wasn’t cut out to become a lawyer.

That week I was frustrated with everything around. So I’d take leave and I left for Washington. I thought I’ll talk to Rachael about it and tell her. I thought she would understand me. So I reached Washington that Thursday. I thought I’ll surprise Rachael by going to her office straight away. I didn’t inform her that I was coming. As soon as I reached her office, I saw her. She was astonished seeing me there. She immediately came up to me and said, ”Hey, what are you doing here? I thought you very going to come over the weekend.”

“Surprise baby. I thought I’ll surprise you. Now common get your bag and let’s go out.”

“I’m sorry Mark, but I’ve got a lot of work right now and I can’t leave. Take the keys of my apartment. I’ll meet you there I’m the evening.”

I was slightly surprised. I thought she would be happy and leave her work for me. But I didn’t take it too seriously. I took the keys and left. We finally met in the evening once she got back. I surprised her by making a good dinner that night. We had a very romantic candlelight dinner. I didn’t know how to tell her about what I’d come for. After dinner I told her about whatever was going on and how unhappy I was being a lawyer. I thought she’d understand and support me but on the contrary she was completely against my thoughts. She thought I was a lunatic. She couldn’t understand. We had a very long argument about this. All I told her was that I wanted a break from things and I needed time to decide about what I actually wanted to do for a living. But she wasn’t willing to understand.

At the end of the conversation all she said was, “Mark, you got to choose what you want. You can either choose to continue working in that law firm and have us together or.”

“Or what Rachael?”

“Or you can do whatever you decide to without me being in your life.”

This was really disheartening. I couldn’t believe my ears .Rachael had told me she wouldn’t be with me if I decided to quit that law firm. So I had decided to put my foot down. I knew I would be miserable in that law firm. So I decided it was best that we would part ways because seeing Rachael behave that way I thought she didn’t love me truly.

We were together for four years and she decides to end the relationship just because of something so small. I thought it wasn’t worth it. Well another beautiful relationship ended in such a tragic way in my life. I left for Maryland the very next morning after spending the night at a small motel in Washington. After getting back to Maryland I quit the law firm and I was virtually jobless then. I would sleep throughout the day and drink all night. I had stopped meeting and socializing with people. I was trying to get over the bad breakup I had with Rachael’s few months down the line I realized it was very difficult surviving without a job. I couldn’t sustain myself. So I had decided to get a job.

There was an opening in one of the supermarkets down the lane where I lived. They needed a cashier for their store. They were ready to pay me 700 dollars a month. Well 700 dollars at that time was enough to make both ends meet. So I started working there. Even though I hated the job, but I had no choice. I could at least afford a few drinks thrice a week at my favorite bar in town.

One day I was cashing out the bill for one of my customers in the supermarket and I suddenly bumped into “Steve.” Steve was my childhood friend from Texas .He was working as the chief editor of the local newspaper in town. He was happy to see me.

“Mark you’ve changed a lot.”

“Ya, I know so have you.”

“But why are you working in this supermarket?”

After work that day Steve and me had gone down to one of the local bars in town for a drink and we thought we could catch up on things. I told Steve everything about what happened. After hearing me out, Steve was a little upset because of my condition. He said he would help me out in whatever possible way he could. I gave him my number.

A week later Steve called me and asked me if I was interested in working for the “Rolling Stones Magazine”. I was excited after he told me about it. He told me they needed a journalist.

 (The Magazine that Marcus worked for in the 70’s)

Who would have to travel around chasing musicians and bands, taking their interviews and writing articles for the magazine. I’d agreed instantly. I thought this could be a beginning of a new phase in life. This might be something I like because of the passion of music that I possessed. So I was on the job immediately. My job had a lot of travelling so I wasn’t in one place. I would have to travel 15 to 20 days a month chasing rock stars and trying to get interviews. It had been 4 years I was doing this. I had started to enjoy what I was doing. Some of the famous artists and bands that I had covered were Led Zeppelin, The Who, Chuck Berry, Cream, John Lennon, Black Sabbath, Jeff Beck and Deep Purple etc.

I was pretty good at my work and I’d also achieved an award for the best journalist that year. But it wasn’t too long that life took another turn. I still remember that day very well. It was the 8th of December 1980. I was in New York to take “Pink Floyd’s” interview. I couldn’t reach them because of the security outside their hotel. So I had gone down to a local bar for a beer just in front of the hotel.

The news was on and what I saw was dreadful. John Lennon was murdered. He was shot in the back four times at the entrance to the building of his apartment in New York. I was stunned seeing that. The entire city was in a state of bother at that time. Everything in the city was congested. I couldn’t believe that John Lennon was no more. I had interviewed him just 3 months back. He was one of the very few people at that time who protested for peace. Lennon’s death was a shock to me. It was really disturbing. I had grown up listening to “The Beatles”. John Lennon had a huge impact on my life. Specially towards the last few years of his life.

There was a peace protest march a day after Lennon’s death which included over 5000 people in New York City. This was like a tribute to John Lennon. I was a part of that protest march myself. After this I couldn’t put my mind to working as a journalist anymore. I tried a lot to overcome this but I couldn’t.

I had quit the “Rolling Stones Magazine” six months down the line. I needed a break in life. I needed piece of mind. I had a lot of savings in my bank account which could help me survive for a year or two. So I decided to leave the United States and move to India. A friend told me that there was a meditation camp somewhere in the “Himalayas” where a lot of Americans had also settled. So I decided to leave.

Once I reached India I was really surprised. India was such a diversified country with so many different cultures and so much of variety. But I had gone for a different purpose. I was into spirituality. So I had planned my climb to the Himalayas. Once I reached there I saw this huge camp. It was basically something like a Buddhist Temple. There were people from all around the world. There were people from the United States, Africa, Russia, Israel, Asia etc. Everyone there had come to look for a meaning in their lives. They were in search of freedom and peace.

After being there for 8 months I had developed an immense patience and concentration. I would mediate religiously and follow the instructions of the Saints that guided us. I had found a meaning in life. I had realized about things that kept me calm and happy and I was in a situation to take charge of my life and make decisions that wasn’t clear about in the past.

After spending 16 months there I had decided to go back and lead a new life But God had a different plan for me. As I was just walking out of the temple, life brought back old buried memories right in front of me in the form of “Sandra”. I was flabbergasted seeing her in front of me after almost 10 years. I did not know how to react .She was about 30 feet away from me. She saw me and turned her face at first. I couldn’t get my eyes off her. After a while she also gave me a few glances. We kept eye contact with each other for a few minutes .I noticed a guy also with her .He was thin, about 6 feet 2 inches tall with long hair. I could easily make out. He was a hippie .Just then suddenly my consciousness had told me to move on. I had come there to find a meaning in my life .I did. It was time for me to go back. I couldn’t stay back and what I wanted to get away from where the old memories and my past. So I walked passed her without even saying a word.

I had a feeling of anger and curiosity inside me. I had question that I wanted to ask her, but I just didn’t want to face my past again. My journey back was about a 2 to 3 day trek downhill to one of the towns and after that I would take a train from there to any of the metropolitan cities from where I could board a flight back to the United Sates. About six hours downhill, there were a few thoughts going through my mind. I wasn’t feeling comfortable. I guess I wanted to get back and ask Sandra those questions. So I turned back.

Once I reached the temple, I straight away went to my hut. That temple had small huts made of hay and stone which were 6 feet in length and 6 feet in breadth. Just outside my hut I saw Sandy along with the guy who had come with her meditating together. I went straight in to my hut.

Late at night I heard someone knocking on my door .I opened it was Sandra. I let her in. She sat down. We didn’t talk to each other for about half an hour. After a while she initiated the conversation.

She asked, “How have you been?”.

I replied rudely, “Why do you care?”

After a while she explained the entire situation to me. She told me after my arrest in Florida she was told by a source that I was arrested for selling drugs and for murdering a man and a week after my arrest I was hung to death by the police. So she didn’t know what to do. Her life had become miserable and she left immediately without telling anyone. She wanted to tell Collin but she couldn’t get in touch with him either. All these years she had no clue that I was alive. After listening to whatever she told me I felt terrible. I didn’t know how to react. Moreover she told me about the guy who she came with. She said she had met him a few years back. He was a complete junkie who could do anything for drugs. She also told me that he would get violent with her and ill treat her. She wasn’t happy with him. She wanted to get away desperately. So I promised that I would get her out of there.

A week later I had planned a escape for the both of us. I had bribed one of the local boys working there. I asked him to get both of us down to the nearest town through the shortest route. He agreed .That night Sandy had come to my hut at about 3:00 am. We both got away from there. After about 3 days we landed up in a city called “Varanasi” from where we took a train back to “New Delhi.” Once we reached New Delhi we knew that we were safe .We boarded a plane back to the United States. Sandra didn’t want to go back to San Francisco because she and Henry lived there so she wanted settle down somewhere else. We moved to “Alabama.”

Alabama was a nice small place to be in. Living in Alabama wasn’t very difficult .Things there were nit very expensive. I had a few of my savings left and Sandra also had a few savings that she had contributed. But I knew those savings were not enough for a lifetime. So I had to get a Job.

I had got a job in one of the farms in town that had belonged to one of the wealthiest man in town. His name was “Kevin Richards”. He belonged to Alabama but stayed in California .He was an industrialist. He needed someone to look after his farms. So I was looking after one of them. I was earning enough to support the both of us. Things were looking better. Sandra was off drugs completely. We were happy together. Things had started looking bright in life. Sandy was also ready to marry me. I thought all my hardships in life had ended and life was going to be easy and beautiful. But I guess God had other plans for me.

One evening after I got back from work I saw the front door open. It was weird because Sandra would always lock it. I called out for Sandra, I looked for her all over the house but she was nowhere to be seen. As soon as I was stepping out to go and look for her I saw a letter on the dining table. I opened it. It just simply had a short message that said, “I am sorry Mark. I can’t do this. I have to leave.”

After reading that letter my life was completely shattered. I didn’t know how to react and what to do. Life had again given me the unexpected .I had gone into major depression. A few days after her departure I had also quit working in the farm. I had no one to live for and nothing to do.

Days had passed, those days had become months .All I did all day was get drunk and sleep. I had no friends, nobody who I could talk to. I just didn’t feel like living anymore. I had lost the strength to fight life .

One evening I was sloshed at the bar I used to go to every second day listening to a local blues band. I had developed a very weird habit those days. I had maintained a diary in which I had started writing the journey of my life. That diary had everything about me in it. I had mentioned everything right from my friends, relationships, events in my life; my experiences etc .I would also carry that diary with me everywhere I went. So all I would do was write if I wasn’t sleeping. I had that diary with me in the bar that night as well.

I was sitting on my favorite barstool as usual. After a while there was this man who came and sat next to me. I had seen him there a couple of time. I had always seen him staring at me. He was doing the same that night as well.

After a while I asked him “Who are you? And why are you staring at me?”

“My name is Paul Smith. I am a publisher by profession. I was staring at you because you look different from the others.”

“Oh really! What’s so different about me?”

“I don’t know, but you just look different.”

I didn’t take his talks too seriously .After a while I tottered my way out of the bar and went home. When I got up the next morning I had a usual bad hangover. My head was splitting. After a while I got fresh and then I’d decided to write a little since I didn’t have anything else to do. I looked for my diary all over but it was no here to be found. I started getting agitated. I was losing patience. I was afraid that no one else got that diary. I had then realized that I must have left it in the bar. So I quickly ran to the bar down the street in my unkempt state. As I reached there I say that same man sitting there. I avoided him .I went up to the bartender and

Asked him if he’d seen my diary .I suddenly heard a voice from behind me. “Are you looking for this?” It was the same man and I saw my diary in his hand

I replied, “How dare you steal my diary.”

“I didn’t steal it. You left it last night after getting drunk.”

I immediately snatched my diary back from him.

“You’ve written a wonderful story” he said.

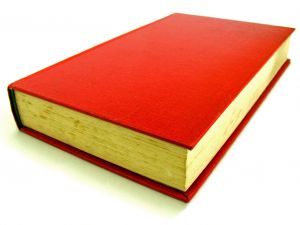
“How could you peep into my diary?”

“I’m really sorry for doing that. But I think your story is wonderful.”

I was furious at him. After a while I calmed down and he told me to write a story on my experiences in life that I had mentioned in my diary and he would help me publish it. Initially I thought it was nothing but

a big joke. But Paul constantly made me believe that I could write a story out of my experiences. I anyways wasn’t doing anything and I also needed money to survive .So I agreed.

Three months down the line , my story was finished. But I had one problem. I couldn’t find a right title. After a lot of thought and time put into it I decided to call the book “My Journey through the Sixties”. It was because it all had started in the sixties. The Sixties had impacted my

(His book My Journey Through The Sixties becomes a bestseller)

life a lot. It was actually the time from when things had started to change in my life. At the same time it also taught me a lot in life. I guess Paul was an angel sent by God to my rescue. After finishing the book I gave him the copy. He helped publishing the book. Two months later, to my surprise my book had become a bestseller. It had sold over 2 million copies in the first year that was in the spring of 1982.Life had suddenly changed. I had become a millionaire. I had become famous. But moreover this book gave me a new path in life. It showed me a new path that I could follow. I finally overcame the biggest struggle in life of not knowing what to do. I had then decided that I wanted to become a writer. Ever since I’ve been writing books. I have written over 20 in the last 25 years and 7 of them have been bestsellers.

 (San Francisco 2007.The present)

“Looking back to the year 1982 that changed my life completely. That gave me all the fame and money. There was still something missing in life. I wish I’d known that you actually existed. .Life would have been much better. But now during the fag end of my life I at least have something to live for and look forward to in the form of you “My Son”. I wish I’d known that you existed, Jack. I just wish.”