

**ONE CANOE,  
MANY  
PADDLES**



# ONE CANOE, MANY PADDLES

**Healing and Living Our Spirit**

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Healing and Living Our Spirit  
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To my sons, Jay and Dustin; my friends and colleagues; and my granddaughter, Nicolette. I am grateful that you are all in my life, and I love you with all my heart.

May we all learn from each other and celebrate the gift of life together.

*Voyage upon life's sea, to yourself be true, and, whatever your lot may be, paddle your own canoe.*



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May Spirit-God bless you!



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	XI
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
Living Life with Awareness and Intention	
CHAPTER 2 .....	9
Healing Our Mental Selves	
CHAPTER 3 .....	31
Healing Our Emotional Selves	
CHAPTER 4 .....	49
Healing Our Physical Selves	
CHAPTER 5 .....	63
Healing Our Spiritual Selves	
CHAPTER 6 .....	103
Checking Our Location	
CHAPTER 7 .....	135
The Paddles Are Many—Life Skills for Smoother Sailing	
CHAPTER 8 .....	199
The Paddles Are Many—Healing and Living Our Spirit	
CHAPTER 9 .....	265
Being Prayer and Gratitude	
CHAPTER 10 .....	277
Using Imagery for Our Health	
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	297



# INTRODUCTION

*One Canoe, Many Paddles—Healing and Living Our Spirit* is the name chosen for this book to describe our personal life journey and the skills—or paddles—that will help in making our lives flow with greater ease, flexibility, resiliency, beauty, and meaning. My son, Dustin, tells me that adding new information is crucial in his job as an electronic design engineer. He explains that you may have a hundred engineering concepts in your mind, but if none of them will help you to design the current engineering project, you will have to search for a new concept. His words are, “If you fail to discover what will work to meet the current engineering challenge, you are in a canoe *but without* a paddle. New information has to be added in order to proceed forward.” My other son, Jay, cannot construct a building with limited and obsolete tools or skills. Every construction project requires him to use progressive techniques so that the building can be completed in a way that yields the best possible results.

We seem to expand our knowledge regarding our occupation readily, willingly, and almost automatically. We can use the same process to create a meaningful and well-lived life. Using a limited number or dysfunctional life strategies will only lead to frustration, anger and unhealthy relationships. Rather than clinging to ineffective ways of thinking and behaving and responding to external directives that we may naively think are truthful and in our best interests, we can discard the obsolete, life-diminishing, and unworkable beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. We can discover ways to heal, and ways to create a life that is supportive of our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of being. We can use life-fostering skills and

spiritual principles that will lead to a life that is increasingly more effective, graceful and grateful. In this way, we honor the gift of life that we have been given.

Our lives are similar to traveling by canoe. A canoe is not built for speed, and a personal journey to greater awareness is not a quick trip. Traveling by canoe offers no protection from nature's moods, just as we, as humans, experience difficult challenges among many days of sunshine and joy. We are carried by the water, but we also need to participate by paddling with skill and rhythm. By staying balanced, we will not capsize.

A canoe is a special image for me because our family has had a red canoe at the lake for many years. If it could speak, it would relay many good stories about sharing, laughing, and special times with wonderful family and friends. It would talk about challenges with the wind and rain and the time when there was a storm and we had to paddle to the nearest shore and take shelter in the woods. Most of all, the canoe would invite us to take time to be calm and quiet, so the lapping water, the birds, the leaves and trees could be truly heard and savored.

There are many names for the power greater than ourselves, including God, Higher Power, Holy Spirit, Universal Force, Lord, Christ-consciousness, Universal Intelligence, the Tao, or Great Spirit. For simplification, "Spirit-God" is used in this writing, but this name is used in the same sense as Higher Power and all of the other names we use for the benevolent power that loves each one of us.

My approach, both in my work as a therapist and in living life, is to use the most useful, uncomplicated, and understandable ways for inner healing, problem-solving, and personal growth. Professionally, I am known as a person who cuts to the chase and deals with reality straight forwardly, with compassion. Through my years as therapist and teacher, I have always believed that I am not qualified to counsel or teach others, unless I have worked through my painful experiences, by taking my share of responsibility, healing and letting go, forgiving and making amends, and even seeing some humor in some

of my difficult challenges.

When walking a sacred healing journey with individuals, I experience the incredible strength of their spirit. They seldom falter in their belief that emotional healing is possible. Despite experiences that caused deep emotional damage and often, paralyzing fear, they have the courage to work a healing process to resolve their inner turmoil, discover themselves, and come to love themselves. It is an inspiration to see them re-design their lives and experience more days of inner peace and serenity.

You may be open to a few ideas as to how to reach a point where your thoughts, beliefs, values, and life skills are manifesting into the life you want to experience. My truths will not necessarily be your truths. However, I always appreciate road signs along the way of my life journey, and you may feel the same. If we share a common interest in designing a life that helps us to heal and live our spirit, there may be some useful ideas in *One Canoe, Many Paddles—Healing and Living our Spirit*.

God bless our sacred journeys over the waters of life. We will continue to seek out truths that can be integrated into our ongoing process of creating a life that is purposeful and reaches out to others in loving kindness. Together, we will find personal meaning by knowing ourselves, sharing ourselves, and truly realizing that all of life is sacred. This is healing and living our spirit.



## CHAPTER 1

# Living Life with Awareness and Intention



*Live each day to the fullest. We will let nothing go unfinished. We will live each day missing nothing. We will say the loving, caring, appreciative words to each other daily. We will say our hellos and goodbyes more meaningfully. We will not assume anything about tomorrow other than to know that God's love will rise before the sun.—Pastor Carl Lee*

Personal growth is often described as a journey to greater awareness, knowledge, wholeness, and appreciation of life. We, as humans, naturally evolve, if we do not block the process by resistance, close-mindedness, or being in an addictive process. We are designed to grow in our awareness, so that we increasingly function out of a higher level of consciousness.

Our personal growth process is unique to each one of us, but usually involves moving out of denial and illusions, relinquishing false information that we have accumulated through the years, recovering from addictions, and healing our emotional wounds. Cultural conditioning is understood, and we recognize that besides individual dysfunction, there are societal dysfunctions. We learn to love and accept ourselves, grow in self-knowledge and take more responsibility for our lives. We come to understand that we are mental, emotional, physical and spiritual beings and are interconnected with all others.

Growing in awareness involves a process of seeing and

understanding more clearly, which leads to more positive thoughts and actions. This journey can be an individual experience. Or, small efforts can start a process that leads to major societal changes. For example, with education and growing awareness regarding the dangers of smoking, individuals have stopped smoking by themselves or through the help of smoking cessation programs. As a result, there has been a major reduction in the number of smokers. Our social systems, such as government, schools, businesses, and churches, added their efforts by passing no-smoking laws, which help to drastically reduce smoking in public places. Youth have been educated about the dangers of smoking. Our awareness and efforts have resulted in better health, fewer deaths, and cleaner air. This began with actively hearing and understanding the information, working through any denial that discounted the dangers, and then taking action and making changes. Smoking was once considered to be normal, and we have evolved in our awareness and realize that smoking is harmful, and therefore, abnormal.

Another area of growing in awareness and taking action involves litter. Years ago, it was not uncommon to see litter flying out of car windows. Once again, with increased awareness, most individuals started to take responsibility for properly disposing of their litter. Society joined in by educating the public and implementing laws and penalties for littering. In schools, children learn that littering is not acceptable. Litter has been drastically reduced in our country, and there are organized efforts to clean ditches along the highways. Littering used to be considered normal, and now, we know that littering is harmful and abnormal. We still have more to do, but progress has been made. Our awareness of pollution and other global environmental issues is also growing.

On a more personal level, because we have evolved in our thinking, pregnant women are now wearing clothing that does not conceal that they are about to give birth. We have grown in awareness, individually and in our society, that pregnancy is a healthy, beautiful, and blessed experience. Along with our growing awareness of the importance of our children, many parents are more expressive of

their love. Warm hugs, affirmations, and “I love you!” are given to many children, often several times during a day.

Personal growth in awareness and in ways of thinking is movement toward whatever is more positive and healthy. The process involves becoming aware, being intentional, and implementing changes, whether it is an individual process or a group process. When we grow in awareness, we become more intentional in our living. Making healthy changes in the way we think, which moves us toward a higher level of consciousness, requires being intentional.

The opposite of living with intention is living by default. We cannot live an automatic, robotic, follow-the-crowd existence and expect to grow in awareness and clarity of thought. Living by default might save us from the discomfort of searching and sorting through our beliefs, but we then run the risk of living a life devoid of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. When we allow our lives to get caught up in a frenzied fog created by our busy calendars, our use of mood-altering substances, our fears, insecurities, and worry, we are not living fully, or with intention. It is easy to go along with what others are doing, such as taking care of our possessions and complaining about our frantic and stressful lives. But if we are allowing ourselves to be seduced by these distractions, we will not take an inward journey, evolve in our consciousness and grow in self-knowledge. Each of us is on a journey in life. At some point in that journey, we will ponder on whether someone else is designing our life, or whether we are intentionally designing our own reality as purposefully, as unlimited, as altruistically, and as meaningful as we truly want our life to be. Not everyone has this freedom. If we are able to make our own choices, the privilege of freedom comes with responsibility, to ourselves and to others. This responsibility involves becoming what we are meant to become and using our strengths and skills to make a positive contribution to the world.

Living with intention is saying “yes” to the challenges and opportunities that life presents and being in touch with all that we are sensing in our body, thinking in our mind, and feeling with our emotions. It is being fully aware of the life learning that is garnered from

our struggles, sorrows, and defeats, as well as our successes, celebrations, and deep connections with others. Living with intention helps us to gather our internal resources when crisis happens, so that we can survive, re-design our lives and move forward. Healing and living our spirit requires that we stay awake to ourselves, to others, and to all of our experiences in life.

The intentional life journey requires honesty, which is a key in growing in integrity, authenticity, and congruency so that what we say and what we do are the same. Our talk is what we walk. When we live with intention, we invest our energies into our priorities that have personal meaning. Very often, relationships are placed on the top of our priority list. We will discover those persons who love us for who we are, who we trust, and who, in times of need, lend sincere comfort and support. We are also more likely to become interested in simple activities like reading a good book, doing crafts with a child, or listening to the sounds of nature.

*Our spiritual goal should be to live life in radical amazement; to look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.*

—Abraham Heschel

Living with intention will help us see the small and large miracles in every day. It is seeing a child succeed against all odds; seeing an elderly woman, bent over with osteoporosis, bringing home-baked brownies to crisis workers; a person laughing with others, despite living with cancer; or seeing a parent-child relationship heal. The right teachers appear just when we need them. A door shuts, and two more are opened. Or we arrive at a situation at the exact right time to be of service to someone. The miracles in life are endless—and we will see more of them if we are paying attention and living with *intention*.

When we live intentionally, we realize that our life lessons and guidance come from many places, sometimes unlikely. One of my

experiences was the lessons I learned from playing tennis. One summer day, I played tennis with Sara, who was a sister to one of our regular players and lives in a neighboring state. She plays tennis more often than I do, and at a level that is more advanced than mine. As I experienced how Sara played, I learned from her, not only about tennis, but also about life. A simple tennis game became a powerful spiritual experience that has positively affected my life.

It was obvious that Sara loved to play the game of tennis. She had a quiet passion about the sport, and her enthusiasm was communicated not only by her words, but by her energies. Her clothing was simple and practical, designed for comfort and ease of movement rather than impressing others. We were playing doubles, so we all introduced ourselves, shook hands, and walked to the court.

Sara's tennis strokes were long and smooth, and her body moved into the stroke of the ball to maintain her balance and increase the speed of her return shot. She chose the placement of her shots based on the positions and movements of the other players, which she carefully watched. Sara had no frantic movements or awkward strokes, because she anticipated where she needed to be to return the ball, with her feet in the right position. There was no wasted energy due to indecision. Whether it was a forehand, backhand, lob, or overhead, her choice of strokes was effective for what she wanted to accomplish.

Sara's movements when playing tennis were smooth and flowing. She seemed to play without effort. Being prepared and ready was an important part of her skills. She played with confidence. When she made an error, forced or unforced, she made no comments and simply prepared herself for the next ball in play. Sara gave no indication that winning was the goal—only playing the game well. Sara's skills created a similar rhythm for me and enhanced my performance. Being gracious, Sara affirmed other players by commenting on their good shots.

I had the thought that Sara would never grow weary while playing tennis—that she could play forever. And it was apparent that she was having fun—a lot of fun. She consistently won the game, set and match. I still think of her at times, and wonder if she really could

play tennis the whole day or forever. It seemed that way to me.

Time spent on the tennis court that day was more than about playing tennis. I walked home thinking about how Sara's well-developed tennis skills resembled how life can be lived. First, it is important to intentionally participate in life, "suing up and showing up" every day, with enthusiasm. Rather than being spectators of life, we can be persons in love with life and passionate in spirit. Being pro-active and balanced is important, and our strokes in life need to be smooth, firm, and powerful in a good sense. Our feet need to be aligned in the right direction. Life is more interesting if we have a full range of effective skills, just as Sara had a full range of tennis strokes.

As we create a design for our lives, we need to be aware that choosing the right strategy or skill for the positive outcome that we seek will be important. Developing confidence in our decisions will eliminate second-guessing and scolding ourselves for minor mistakes. With fewer wasted movements, our energies will be put in the right places. Our life journey can become graceful, smooth, and flowing as we respond to life with effective and decisive strokes. We can approach life with calmness, a quiet certainty, a dedication and motivation to play our very best throughout life. With these living skills, we are sure to have fun—a lot of fun.

Tennis can also teach us about relationships. The best relationships are with people who love to play, who are not afraid to play, and who believe that they are able to play. We are more likely to relate better in life to people whose interests in life are similar to ours. There is less conflict in relationships with persons who allow others the freedom to play their own game, rather than dictate how they think the game should be played. Our connections are more meaningful with people who have a passion for life, who have a strong melody of their own, and who also have a graceful flow that is life-fostering and empowering to others.

For me, the tennis game was a spiritual experience and provided lessons about being proactive, intentional, efficient, and confident. Sara appeared to never become exhausted from playing tennis, and most of us never want to grow weary of life. Rather, we want to

continue to learn, live in willingness and gratitude, and be of service to others. With this design in place, we will feel that we could live forever, without becoming bored or tired. We want our energies to positively affect others. To be graceful is nice, but to be effective is even more important. And, oh, yes, the clothing must be comfortable, and designed for movement! Sara was an angel with a message, though I'm sure she did this quite unknowingly. By the way that she played tennis, she showed me how life can be lived.

When I watch the masters in any discipline or art form, there is no *apparent* strain in their performance. Master artists make it seem almost effortless, which is made possible by their tremendous dedication, focus, and practice. As performers bring their skills to near perfection, they place us in a realm between earth and heaven, between humanness and a transcendent realm. The artist gives us the gift of what seems like human perfection. Though our lives may not reach this level of skill, beauty, and grace, it can be the goal to which we aspire. Being intentional is required if we are to achieve this, or any other personal goal.

Living with intention requires enthusiasm for life. This will naturally happen with positive thinking and positive *doing*. Our thinking and doing can be ho-hum, and our life will dwindle down to the phrase, "same old, same old, but a different day." Or, our thinking can be gung ho, and our experiences and activities will be interesting and exciting. It is enthusiasm for life and living life with intention that makes the difference. Growing in awareness, staying alert to life, and being intentional is healing and living our spirit.

### To Ponder...

- *You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, and find your element in each moment.*—Henry David Thoreau
- *Life is like sports: you can be a spectator or an active participant.*

☞ ONE CANOE, MANY PADDLES

- *The tragedy of life is what dies in people while they live.*
- *Life is a great big canvas; throw all the paint on it you can.—  
Danny Kaye*
- *Only you can be yourself. No one else is qualified for the  
job.*
- *Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and  
dance.*
- *A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a  
detour.*
- *When the voice and vision on the inside become more pro-  
found and clear than the opinions on the outside, then you  
have mastered your life.*

**A Canoe Thought:** *Originality is unexplored territory. You  
get there by carrying a canoe—you can't take a taxi.—Alan  
Alda, American actor*