

The Manic Path to Quality: My ZAMM Awakening

by:
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My upbringing wasn't anything too different than many around me at the time. I grew up in a multicultural family in the suburbs of Washington, DC in the late 80's and early 90's. I played little league, went to church, played video games and did the other things many do during their childhoods. Yet, unlike most childhoods, my family had to make ends meet by waking up every morning at 2pm to deliver hundreds of the Washington Post newspaper for over five years. And this began the duality of my own self...

I wasn't the best with school - more street-smart than book - DEFINITELY not a Scholar. My family was more into the arts, so I participated in theatre, music and similar areas. As I grew older, I really wasn't sure what I was, mainly going through the motions, doing the things that everyone else tried to do and succeed in. Look good, be popular, DON'T stick out for bad reasons. An ego-driven life is what it became in all honesty - trying to appear altogether, yet knowing it was just a facade.

The first time I learned about ZAMM was in my early twenties. An older friend of mine had a small journey of discovery himself after reading it and it seemed to have made an impact on his life. But that is where I left it, pinned in my memories somewhere for another time...

It's now a decade later, and I'm married with a 1 year-old son with another on the way. My wife and I have been married 10 years. Life was quite difficult and getting harder each day. We fought all the time. Our son was quite challenging as an infant. We both lost our jobs within months of one another. Though we both knew we loved each other, the pain of every day started to become too great.

I was lost and didn't know what to do or where to go. Nothing about me, my life and the world around me made any sense. And though I knew in my heart I had no self-esteem, I still maintained the exterior of ego because I had nothing else. I was rigid, I was exacting and a lot of time, quite unpleasant. I could turn on a dime and be ecstatic one minute and become monstrous the next.

It was around this time that my memory triggered and it came back out of nowhere. I don't remember how... My friend... ZAMM... His own journey that changed him... So I didn't do any research, didn't want to know anything about Robert except read his book. I thought I'd just give it a shot. Maybe he has some ideas that could help...? What's the harm...?

I found a used copy at my local bookstore. \$.99 cents. In retrospect, what that dollar was about to pay for I couldn't imagine at the time. I just needed some direction and it was a good deal. I started reading Zen every day to and from work riding the subway. At the start, it was interesting for sure. It took me to get used to the style and "thickness" of each paragraph. I definitely had to reread many pages many times.

And then, slowly at first, crystallization began. Each time I read, more crystallization came. Faster and faster, connecting so many of my thoughts I had in my own lifetime. Each page was a new adventure into my own self, presenting me with questions and answers that I only had

inside my own mind all this time. Slippage after slippage...

Soon, the crystallization became something else entirely. One evening, after finishing Chapter 29, I intentionally taped the remaining pages of my copy of ZAMM. At the time, I felt it wasn't time to finish the story. Looking back, I think I had a sense of what was to be when I did this...

And then, starting on April 24, 2015, I began my descent into pure mania for three days. Though hard to describe and even remember the entirety of the events during this window, what I can say is that it was a systematic deconstruction of what I was into what I wanted to be. From the outsider's view, I was completely out of my mind. Speaking 'gibberish' and repeating to myself over and over. Not sleeping, not eating, just in my own world. My wife wept watching me during all of this, not knowing what to do. But what I was doing was living in Dynamic Quality for three straight days and was being remade with an eye towards Quality because of it.

After my 3-day mania ended and I was back in the land of the "sane", I had collapsed in the backyard. The roller coaster had ended. My wife and father looked on as I was then taken by ambulance to the emergency room, where the doctors then informed me of my diagnosis: I am Bipolar and I needed to stay for evaluation.

With this one statement, the entirety of my entire life's journey flashed almost instantly. I even yelled, "OOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHH!!!!" The horrid incidents, the regrets, and yet even the fantastic days... now we're making some sense of what the hell kept going sideways! Of course!!!

And here is where I first met my newest family unit - the "Family of the Insane", where the only prerequisite is to be given that label. All people are welcome: every race, creed, color, size and shape. This experience and the people in it are just so precious to me to this day, as they were the first people to feel how I wanted to be for this world the rest of my life.

What this one label actually did was give me what I needed: Freedom. Freedom from my false self. Freedom to not have to compete with everyone else. Freedom from the Ego. Freedom to be me, each and every day, to everyone I'd meet. A person of Quality just trying to make the world slightly better. A personal "copernican revolution" if you will!

Out after a week in the hospital and another week of outpatient therapy, I began my new life in earnest, trying to find footing as my new, Quality-aligned self in everything I did. I was able to then go back to work, but everything was different. I finally felt that I was someone who COULD be good for the sake of goodness itself, no longer wasting my life's time to achieve the empty calories of "objects" being the primary.

It was many months afterward that I finally went back to ZAMM and to finish Robert's journey. It was time to cut the taped pages and read onward. I was ready now. In retrospect of what was about to happen, I feel this quote summarizes it nicely:

"When you live in the shadow of insanity, the presence of another mind that thinks and talks as yours does is something close to a blessed event." - ZAMM, Chapter 22.

When reading the remainder of ZAMM for this first time, those that know the end can probably somewhat imagine how THAT went. I, at a basic level, was almost reading a biography of what had happened to me over those three manic days. I had gone on this journey of discovery, following through ZAMM the steps Robert took and I landed in a mental hospital because of it

too. I was stunned. I still don't know what to make of it to be honest. Maybe just a wild coincidence. What I do know is that though the idea of Quality destroyed that old version of me, it also became the saving foundation of the new version writing this today. And as I write this, it is now my 10th anniversary of my manic event and diagnosis.

Of course, my story continues from there. What happened with my wife and her own challenge months after my own; to when I discovered the existence of Lila and its second illumination for me; what I've tried to do with Quality in teaching it to my sons at an early age; to my second hospitalization two years ago (I call it my "tune up" moment); and then to now, where the journey has led me to become a Mental Health Coach through my practice, Mental Health Maintenance.

It is my hope through this work I can support the people out there that need Quality the most. A reinvention of how they look at this world and gain hope there is something more than what we've been trained to see in front of us, and how to navigate the world to make it better for all, led by Quality and honestly, some learnings from the world of the "insane".

I don't know if I'll be successful, but that is not the point now, is it? I do it because I cannot think of any other way to be. A fellow custodian of Robert's message to share with however many we can reach and hope it'll be enough. We need it now more than ever.

And though I've felt so much Quality with the people I've encountered over these last 10 years, there was still a loneliness. I didn't have anyone that knew ZAMM itself, let alone people I could talk to about it deeply. And even though I was making wonderful connections with those around me daily, when Robert passed two years after my hospitalization, I never felt more alone. I wept for a long time when I heard the news. Every now and again, I'd search out to find anyone that could fill that void now that there was no way I could ever meet him. (It was a long shot, but a small wish I had.)

And then I found RP.org! I'm ecstatic to have found you all and share my story. A new group of KIN... fellow followers of Robert's "zany idea" that is Quality. I truly hope that I can meet and talk with all of you, as there's so much more to say, but even more importantly, to be able to hear and learn from your amazing journeys with Quality and Robert. I'm not alone anymore on this track after all.

Thank you for reading this... and Keep it Quality. :)

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