

**Remarks by Sandy McIlree**  
**Host of “The Sandy Show”**  
**103.1 Austin’s 80s Station and Syndicated Nationwide**

Hey, thank you, good to see you all tonight. It’s great to be here, and I’m looking forward to sharing a little bit about my personal life experience with you. I promise not to bore you with a lot of dull details, but I’ve had an interesting ride these past few years, and I’ve learned a lot from the highs and lows . . . and I’m hoping you can take something from the stories I’m going to tell to help you in your own travels.

Let’s face it—it ain’t smooth sailing all the time for any of us . . . although I guess I was pretty naïve because I kind of thought it would be. Don’t get me wrong: I knew there would be hardships in life, but I thought I had it made in my career. In hindsight, I guess I’ve been pretty lucky: I was halfway through my 40s before I ran into really rough waters.

But first, I need to start out with an apology . . . to Mary Smith. Mary, where are you? There she is, way in the back. Before we got started, I had a chance to visit with Mary, and she told me she was excited to meet me. She said she’s a big fan, been following my career for years . . . and she just really loved me on “The Shield.” (big photo of Michael Chiklis appears in background) . . . LONG PAUSE . . . and I just didn’t have the heart to tell her I’m not Michael Chiklis. Sorry, Mary. I hope you’ll still be glad you came tonight.

Come on—ladies, at least—I’m a lot better looking, right? (turn slowly to give profiles)

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Okay. I’m not LAPD Detective Vic Mackey. I’m not an Emmy Award-winning actor like Chiklis. In fact, I’m feeling a little weird about being here because a lot of the people who give talks like this one have done something really outstanding in their lives. They were a Navy Seal, a four-star general, or a Medal of Honor or Purple Heart recipient. Maybe they ran the Boston

Marathon with one leg, took a major company public, or were MVP in the Super Bowl. I haven't done any of those things.

But I am a lot like Michael Chiklis' character in "The Shield" in some ways. If Detective Vic Mackey was one thing, *he was relentless*. Anybody else here, besides Mary, ever watch that show? Vic Mackey was fierce, I'm telling you. He was a pit bull. Once he sunk his teeth into a case, he didn't let go, and nothing – nothing – stopped him until he got what he was looking for. and he was imaginative about how he went about it. Okay, his methods were sometimes questionable, but that's another story. I'm just saying—the guy was tenacious. So am I, when I know what I'm going for. So Vic and I do share a few of traits . . . besides a big bald head!

The reason I'm here is because I'm a guy with a lot of experience and a few stories to learn from. I'm just like you—absolutely no different from anyone here.

Maybe I haven't done anything really amazing in my life. But what I have done is worked my ass off. I climbed to the top of the mountain—in my chosen profession, at least—and then I spectacularly plunged to the bottom.

The handwriting had been on the wall a long time, but I just hadn't recognized it. Even on the day it all came crashing down, I didn't see it for what it was. It took me a long time to even realize I was at the bottom. I was smug. Cocky, even. The territory had changed, but to be honest, I thought I was just in another place where I'd soon be king. Well, it didn't exactly happen that way, as I'm about to tell you.

## Career Start in Radio

But first, you need to know a little about me. I'm going to try to put it on a bumper sticker because I don't want this to be about me, me, me.

I'm a morning radio show host. I got my start in Omaha, Nebraska, where I grew up a military brat. I had just graduated college and was having lunch with a girl I was dating who worked at the MAC cosmetics counter. When we finished our meal, she said she had to go do make-up that afternoon for a WHEN Radio DJ who was having her headshot taken. I'd always wanted to see the inside of a radio station, so I asked if I could go.

We happened to be there when the DJs were changing from the midday to the afternoon drive. When the afternoon guy walked in, I asked him: "Hey, do you guys have any jobs around here?" He said, "Nope," and I said, "Come on, you have to have something. I'll take out the trash."

He looked at me, rolled his eyes, and said, "You think you can be on the radio?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Okay, I go on at three o'clock. Be here at 3:05." So I come back, walk into the studio, and he hands me a piece of paper. "Take a look at this," he says. "When I point at you, start reading. Put your mouth right up to the mike."

I look at it. He points at me, and I start reading. It's an ad for *Money* magazine. About a sentence or two into it, I'm thinking, "This is boring as hell," and so I start making stuff up. But I got the important stuff in—the phone number, why you should call, the part about getting the free tote bag if you call right now. I get done, and he gives me this look. I put my hands up and shrug. He covers the mike and says, "You're hired!"

I said, "Okay, cool." And never looked back.

I started out working 6 AM – Noon on Sundays during the gospel hour. Only an hour and 15 of it was live, and I was basically just pushing buttons. I worked my way up—went to

overnights, then nights. On my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, I got a call from a consultant who happened to be driving through Omaha and listened to my show. He asked me if I'd be interested in doing a morning show in either Rapid City, South Dakota; Cape Cod; or Syracuse, New York. I went to Rapid City for the interview—by the way, my current podcast, “The Sandy Show,” is on that same station now—and I took the job in Syracuse. After two brutal winters, I got the break of a lifetime and came to Austin.

“The JB & Sandy Morning Show”—which I co-hosted with my buddy, J.B. Hager—aired from 6 to 10 AM, five days a week, on Mix 94.7 FM in Austin for more than 18 years. That's a lifetime in radio. We were one of the best-known duos in radio nationwide, our show won multiple awards, and I racked some nice ones up for myself. I was named "Austin's Best Radio Personality" by *The Austin Chronicle* five times, "Best Radio Personality" by *Austin Monthly* magazine twice, and nominated to the Texas Radio Hall of Honor. I was riding high, making a lot of money—and honestly, I thought there was no end in sight.

## The Fall

Now, don't misunderstand. I wasn't totally clueless. I knew the radio industry was changing, but it just wasn't at the top of my mind. It wasn't just consolidation in the industry; the technology was changing, and the ratings delivery was changing. And the data showed people weren't listening to the radio the way they used to. Instead of tuning into one station and staying there, they were constantly punching the dial. So the way you did your show needed to change, and that's more true today than it was five years ago. You've gotta get the audience's attention within six seconds or less. You have to start with a headline and then tease the crap out of it. You can't just open a microphone and start talking. If you're not fast-paced and interesting, they'll drop you in a heartbeat.

But somehow, I didn't really expect any of that to impact me. I mean, we had a huge fan base in Austin. Our ratings were high. I was more successful than I had ever dreamed of being. Looking back, I guess I thought I was better than the changes . . . that I could keep doing it my way as long as I wanted.

I was wrong, and I dramatically overplayed my hand.

JB left Mix 94.7 in late fall 2012. In February 2013, the station's owners offered to renew my contract, but I didn't like the terms and chose instead to leave. It was the biggest, baddest decision I have ever made. The truth is, I thought I was irreplaceable. I thought 94.7 would collapse without me. Well, last time I checked, they're doing just fine.

### **Starting the Climb Back Up—The Fringe, Cincinnati**

Losing that 18-year gig—and the money that came with it—was a real sucker punch. I was completely disoriented. But I still thought what I did would translate in a different setting. I was confident the fans would follow me. From the outpouring of love we were getting from them on social media, it was clear they missed us and wanted us back.

Within a few months, J.B. and I cut a deal with a local producer to take our show to a new Austin station—The Fringe—that was going on air that spring. It wasn't much money in the beginning, but we thought if we hung in there, the money would come. I made extra money any way I could. One way was that I refinished a lot of garage floors. It was filthy work, but it kept me busy and brought in some extra cash.

But as it turned out, The Fringe never had the backing, financial or otherwise, to get our show off the ground. I knew a sinking ship when I saw one, and after nearly a year of trying to make it work, I left. I didn't have anything else lined up, but I couldn't afford to be associated with a failed show.

Now, if you think about it, there are only so many morning DJ spots in one town, and Austin stations had nothing for me. I started talking to stations in other cities and states, and eventually moved to Cincinnati and did a morning show there. It was one of the toughest times of my life. My wife and daughter stayed behind in Austin, and being away from them was really hard on us all.

But workwise, things were looking good, from my perspective. The station's ratings were going up, and just over a year after the show debuted, I got a call from a syndicator who wanted to take it nationwide.

That syndication call came on Friday, January 26, 2018. I was walking on air, thinking, "This is fantastic! I'm back!" I didn't even get to tell the station manager. The next Monday morning, they fired me.

I was 46 years old, and I'd never been fired in my life.

Talk about going from a high to a low. Then, I got to call my wife and tell her. That was *great*. You've heard the old saying, "lower than a snake's belly"? That's where I was.

In the span of three years, I'd:

- walked away from a job at Mix 94.7 that I thought would be mine as long as I wanted it;
- tried and to make our show a success on a small independent station; and
- spent a year away from my family building up a Cincinnati station's ratings, only to be fired.

But here's what I want to tell you: *That long fall from grace—as shocking and painful as it was—turned out to be an incredible stepping stone for personal growth.*

## Lessons Learned

For one thing, I learned pretty damn fast that, no matter how depressed you are, you can't just go to bed. The world doesn't stop because you're having a personal crisis. Like Rocky, when you get knocked down seven times, you gotta get up eight.

**My grandfather knew a lot about taking a punch and getting back up.** As a young man, he was a boxer. When I was a kid, he told me a story about one night when he was fighting in Madison Square Garden. I guess they were several rounds into the match, between rounds, and my uncle—the corner man—patted my grandfather on the shoulder and told him, “You’re doing great!” Granddad took one look at him and said, “Well keep your eye on the referee because somebody’s beating the shit out of me!”

The point: Never lose your sense of humor. You’re going to get your teeth kicked in in life and in business, but don’t lose your sense of humor about it. It’s not the end of the world.

And there’s another point to my grandfather’s story: When things seem to go wrong, try to see the big picture. A lot of times, the things that are hurting you are the things you’re not seeing. My uncle, the corner man, was only watching the other fighter; he wasn’t looking at all the other things that were getting Granddad hurt. Like the fact that he didn’t train enough. And he smoked. And he wasn’t passionate about boxing; he only did it for money. He just happened to be pretty damn good.

So, be aware of the big picture. It may not be the person standing right in front of you who’s beating the shit out of you. It could be that you eat crappy food, or you don’t exercise. It could be you don’t pay attention to your kids or your spouse. Or maybe you come in late to work every morning, or you just do enough to barely get by. You don’t go an extra inch, much less the extra mile.

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Over the past few years, I've talked to some really successful businesspeople. My good friend, Scott Crossett, who owns Apple Leasing in Austin; John Ramming, of Ramming Paving; and a few others. They all tell me the same thing: *They worked their asses off. They learned their industry up, down, and inside-out.*

**Take John Ramming.** If his company was paving a highway and a truck driver called in sick, John could drive the truck if need be. He could mix concrete. He could manage the crew. Because he's done it all at some point in his career. And to this day, he doesn't think he's too good to do any of it. He can understand and empathize with every one of his employees because he has done each of their jobs.

**Scott Crossett's story is pretty amazing.** As a young man, he was pretty much homeless. His parents had kicked him out, he was using drugs and barely making it to work. He got fired from one job. Then he talked his way into a job selling used cars. At the time, Scotty had only one dress shirt, so early every morning, he would take it to a One-Hour Martinizing shop and stand outside, bare from the waist up, until his shirt was ready . . . and then he'd put it on and go to work.

Scotty was determined to get his life together, and he focused on learning the car business. He started with make-ready and detailing, and worked his way up. After a few years, he started his own leasing business with a \$100,000 CD his employee's father signed on. Her name was Pam, and she was Scott's only employee.

They got out the yellow pages and started making cold calls. Pam took A-M, and Scotty took N-Z. *Pam hated it.* Four calls in—still in the triple-As, she told Scott, "I can't do this anymore." And he told her, "Just make three more calls." Her very next call was to Triple-A Plumbing. When she gave him her pitch, the owner said, "Yeah, we do need to lease some trucks." Scott's been leasing trucks to them for 30 years, all stemming from one call. That's all it



takes. He has made a phenomenal amount of money with Apple Leasing. Oh, and Pam still works for him.

Scotty got knocked down quite a few times, but he kept getting up, and he's a very successful man today. And this is the absolute truth: *I've never known anyone more grateful and giving than my friend, Scott Crossett.*

So, don't worry about failing. I think it was Charlie Chaplain who said, "Failure is unimportant. It takes courage to make a fool of yourself." The fact is, we are all capable of more than we think we are; we are just sometimes afraid of stepping out of the box we're comfortable in . . . of pushing our own limits. Being desperate is a good cure for that! When your back's against the wall, you push. You have no other choice. Because fear of losing everything you've worked hard for is far more powerful than fear of failure. And yeah, you *will* fail a few times, maybe even a lot of times. But history is replete with great people who failed, again and again, before achieving success. Survival is a part of our DNA. We were built not only to survive, but to thrive.

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Another thing I learned is learned *there's no such thing as a self-made man or woman.* The truth is, at The Fringe, I didn't have the team I had at 94.7—the people who helped me achieve my success (which, by the way, I had never recognized before). I didn't have a great program director. I didn't have a great producer who really knew what they were doing. I didn't have a music director to choose and schedule the music. I didn't have a general manager who was really sharp. I didn't have any of that over there. That's like Tom Brady going to another team where no one knows how to catch the football, and thinking, "I can just throw the ball. It'll be fine." I was THE TALENT, and I thought that was all that was necessary. I didn't realize *it takes a great team to do a great show.*

So don't let yourself get in a zone, with blinders on, where you don't realize the importance of the people around you. Every successful person has had help from multiple other people, right down to the person who answers the phone, sorts and delivers the mail, or runs errands for you. Let them know you value them.

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Stay tuned in to your industry. Radio was phasing out big on-air local personalities in favor of one syndicated personality. They were homogenizing, and it took me three or four years to hit on that. The answer to the big question of how I would use the experience and knowledge I had accumulated over 30 years in radio was right in front of my face: Syndication.

And that is the rule, not the exception. The answer to most of questions we agonize over is usually obvious. Maybe it's a process we need to go through before we can see it, or maybe it looks like too steep a mountain to climb. I was trying to find the easy way out. It seemed like the solution was to just get a regular job. But in my heart, I knew what I needed to do.

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to **play golf at the famous St. Andrews Links in Scotland.** I came up to a shot that looked like a straight put. Dead straight. But the caddy, a Scotsman, told me, "Hit it two feet to the left." I looked at him and said, "Are you sure about that? It looks pretty straight to me." He let out a big sigh and says, "Laddy, there's been two t'ings I've been sure of in my life: (1) The first time I had sex, I knew I wanted to do that again, and (2) hit it two feet left." And he was right. I sank the putt.

Trust your instincts. Know what you're good at and what will make you happy. And then follow through. Even if it seems crazy and other people try to dissuade you—do it anyway. It's the only way you're going to be really successful, in business and in life.

## The Syndication Path

After all the highs and lows . . . after all the trying and failing, I finally arrived at a point where I knew, instinctively, that syndication was the answer. And I was all in. I did the hard work necessary to turn our show into a podcast starring my wife, Tricia, and me. You can listen us anywhere you listen to podcasts. Just search “The Sandy Show.”

I can’t say we’ve achieved success yet, but we’re on the air in ## stations nationwide today, and we’re steadily adding more. We’ve run the numbers backward and forward, we know what we have to do, and we’re committed . . . because we know we’re on the right path.

True story: The best story I know about being committed to doing what feels right, and to hell with the consequences. **My late father-in-law, Hugh Williamson—we call him “Pap”**—spent 40-plus years in the Ironworker’s Union. He started out at the lowest rung on the ladder—basically, a laborer—and worked his way up. When he retired, he was the second-highest official in the Ironworker’s Union in the United States.

Sometime in the 1950s, probably, Pap was business agent for Ironworker’s Local #84 in Houston. He didn’t have much formal education—grew up a Georgia farm boy and dropped out of school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to help with the chores—but he was a smart man . . . and very forward-thinking for the times. He was determined to institute a pension for members of Local Union #84, so they’d have a secure retirement.

But to do that, he had to convince the rank-and-file members to approve having a really small amount of money—maybe 25 cents a day or something—to fund the pension plan. That was no small task. Pap knew the members were overwhelmingly against it. They’d rather have that extra few bucks in their pockets.

Now, back in those days, unions halls were pretty rough and rowdy places. Probably three-fourths of the men who came to the meetings had been drinking and half of them were downright drunk. And a lot of them were carrying guns. That’s a dangerous combination, but

that was the situation in the smoky union hall the night Pap called for a vote on the pension plan.

The men cast their ballots, and someone counted them, stacking them up on the head table. The clerk announced the motion to fund the pension plan failed. Pap swept all the ballots off the table into the trash can and said, “That one didn’t turn out right. We’re going to take another vote.” And despite a lot of yelling and complaining, they did. But when the second round of ballots was counted, the motion failed again. And again, Pap swept them off the table and said, “We’re gonna vote again, and we’re gonna keep voting, until you get this right.” And he got his way. The motion finally passed, the pension plan was established, and thousands of retired ironworkers and their families today have Pap to thank for their financial security.

Pap could have easily been shot that night or gotten the hell beat out of him, at the least. I didn’t meet him until he was near 90, but he was a strong-willed a man as I’ve ever seen. And as a young man, I think he was a pretty tough character. He knew what he was doing was right. And he was willing to put his life on the line to accomplish his goal.

If we’re really serious about succeeding, we should all take a page from Pap’s playbook.

I’m not comparing myself to him, believe me, but I knew syndication was the answer. I knew it, I committed, and we’re making it work.

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So this whole series of what, at the time, seemed like life-shattering events . . . that’s what put me on the path to syndication. And once I got on that path, WOW—*the things I’ve learned!*

For one thing, when I started in the syndication thing, I didn’t even know what kind of microphone I used. I’d been doing radio for 30 years, and I had no idea what kind of mike to buy! Not a clue. Now, I *pay attention to the details.*

I learned *no one is going to give you anything*. People will help you, but you have to earn their help. And it's a lot better when you earn it.

Whether you're working for a company, you're self-employed, writing a book, or trying to get a syndicated show off the ground—you have to *go the extra mile*. Do more than what you've been hired to do. It's so simple, but sometimes so hard to put into practice . . . but in order to succeed and accomplish your goals, you have to be willing to do what the other guy isn't. You have to add value. Period. That's it.

**Tiger Woods** was willing to go the extra mile, and for him it was practice. For me, it's penning handwritten notes to affiliates. Doing extra promo spots here and there. Doing more than what we promised. If we promised them 12 bits a day, 11 teases and a promo, I give them all that, plus video, plus social media, plus additional teases every day at the half-hour. Plus, plus, plus. Because that other guy is too lazy to do that. People who are willing to go the extra mile set themselves apart from the ordinary. They exhibit a spirit of excellence, which leads to success in every part of business and life.

Of course, you also have to be willing to push back when it's enough, so you don't get run over.

**My grandfather—my Mom's dad**—was a guy with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education. He would lecture every grandchild about the importance of working hard. He used to say, "They can take your house, your car, your dog, your shoes . . . everything you have. But they can't take your education. They can't take your experience, your passion. They can't take your work ethic."

Now, we didn't know who "they" were, but we got the message: *All those things "they" could take were only material things. They weren't what really matters.*

I remember being with my grandfather once on Martin Luther King Day, back in the 1960s. He told us kids, "Martin Luther King was the greatest man who ever lived." That wasn't

something you often heard an old Southern man say in those days. It took tremendous conviction. He liked MLK's inclusive attitude. Unlike Jesse Jackson, who approached civil rights with an "Us against Them" perspective, Dr. King's point of view is that we were all "Us," and we all should work together for the common good.

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Here's a major lesson: It seems so simple, but it's something I think a lot of us forget to do . . . and we have to keep re-learning it all our lives. *Be grateful.*

I thought I was grateful for my success at 94.7 all those years . . . I thought I was grateful for the celebrity, the recognition, the money I made, and the nice things I was able to buy. But it took losing all that to realize that I wasn't truly grateful. I didn't comprehend how fortunate I was, and I took it all for granted.

**When I think of being grateful, I think of my Dad.** He's the wisest man I've ever known. As I said earlier, I was an Army brat. Dad was in the Air Force, and we traveled all over the world when I was a kid. Dad retired about ## years ago with the rank of colonel. So he and my Mom have a nice, comfortable retirement, but they don't have an extravagant lifestyle, by any means. They still live in the house I grew up in Omaha in the house I grew up in. They still have the same furniture. They drive their cars until they really need a new one.

Their family is their treasure.

For this next story to make sense, you need to know a little about my dad's childhood. He grew up in an apartment in a crappy neighborhood on the Lower East Side of New York City —with a dad who was a good-time Charlie, a mother who was literally crazy, and a psychotic grandmother. When he was a kid, Dad used to sleep on the fire escape outside his bedroom window. That was the only place he could be outside. It was cooler out there in the summertime, and it was a place to get away from the family.

Just a few years ago, I was visiting my parents in Omaha, and my Dad and I were sitting in the backyard. It was early October, and the air was cool and crisp—a definite sign of the cold Nebraska winter to come. My dad was, like, “Ugh, winter. I hate it. Hate the cold, shoveling snow, not being able to sit outside.”

I said, “Dad, you’re retired. Why don’t you and Mom move to Texas or Arizona or someplace warm?”

He took a drink of his martini. Sat it down. And he said, “Sandy, I never even dreamed I’d even have a backyard.”

*That’s gratitude.*

## Closing

There’s one thing I haven’t touched on that was—and is—an absolutely critical part of my journey . . . and that’s getting sober. I was a social drinker, never a sloppy, falling down drunk. But about few years ago, I realized alcohol was playing too big a role in my daily life. It was interfering with my marriage. It was affecting my moods and attitudes. I decided to do something about it, and last February, I celebrated four years of sobriety. It has made a tremendous, positive difference in my life. In fact, I’m not sure I could have made it through the past few years if I hadn’t made that decision and stuck to it. I’m not here to preach to anyone; I’m just saying that was the right thing for me.

So, to recap what I’ve learned on my journey these past few years:

Recognize that your fall from grace may be—most likely is—an opportunity for personal growth. Try to embrace it. This may take a little time, but you’ll get there!

No one is irreplaceable, and no one is self-made. It takes a great team to produce a great result, no matter what business you’re in. So look around you, see who is helping make whatever you’re doing a success, and tell them you recognize and appreciate their contributions.

Stay in tune with your industry. Learn it inside-out, upside-down, backward and forward. Pay attention to details. Recognize changes—anticipate them if you can—and do your best to adapt.

But bring your guts, too. It's hard to change, but it's crucial to success. Maybe it will help to realize that the NFL—a multibillion-dollar business—does it all the time. A few years ago, they changed their rules of play three times in the middle of a season. It was obvious fans don't like low-scoring games, so they changed some rules protecting quarterbacks and allowing receivers to get open. In response, the defense had to change, too, on how they hit them. You can relate that all to business. You might not like filling out third form, but you may have to do it anyway if that's what it takes to give customers what they want.

Work your ass off. Do what is expected of you, and then do a little more. Go the extra mile because that's what it takes to achieve excellence and win out over the competition.

Be tenacious. Make that next phone call; it could be the one that wins you the big prize.

Be prepared to fail . . . because you will. When you get knocked down seven times, be like Rocky: get back up eight. And keep a sense of humor about it. I promise you that just doing that one thing will save you a thousand times over.

And when you do fall, try to see the big picture. What's beating you down just might not be the person or thing you think it is. Be willing to take an honest look at yourself. You may be sabotaging yourself in some ways.

Be open to new opportunities. Remember that when one door closes, it often opens another . . . with something far better behind it. Be wide-eyed and ready for that to happen. And when it does . . .

Trust your instincts. Know what you're good at and what makes you happy. Then go for it with gusto. If you believe in something, be willing to put it all on the line to achieve it. And don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself. We all try and fail. And we're all capable of more than we think we are.

If you need help, ask for it. People will help you, but they're not going to give you anything. You have to earn it. So be ready to give help freely.

And when you do finally make it, be grateful. Give back. Recognize what is important in life, and live every day in gratitude for what you have.

So, there you have it: My pearls of wisdom—a gift from me to you. Some of them probably seem pretty obvious, but they're easy to forget. Like any skill, you have to take them out and use them every day, so they become intuitive . . . a part of you.



I hope, by sharing my fall from grace with you . . . and the journey it set me on for the past several years . . . I have given each of you at least one little insight that resonates. Something that is giving you a light-bulb moment now or will in the future, whenever you run aground and need a little inspiration.

And I want to leave you with a laugh:

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