

The Road That Led Here

The Collision of Moments

There was only one thing going through my mind as the sudden impact of the collision sent my truck rolling onto the driver's side:

I'm about halfway through this. I think I can survive.

As my truck skidded along the roadway at nearly fifty miles an hour, glass from the shattered driver's-side window flew through the cab in every direction. I gripped the steering wheel tightly. The seatbelt cinched across my waist and chest, pinning me to the seat. Sparks flew as steel scraped against asphalt just inches from my left shoulder.

It was a catalytic moment.

A longtime friend named Carl, who spent his career in the insurance industry, once told me that the average time between initial impact and complete stop is eight to ten seconds. That's all. During those harrowing seconds on the freeway, his statistic suddenly returned to me.

Life can work the same way. Moments collide with us—shaking us, shaping us, forcing change. The truck crash was mine.

I walked away physically unhurt, but the psychological and emotional impact lingered far longer than bruises ever could. The crash became a turning point, a vivid reminder that certain moments demand a response, a reckoning, and eventually, transformation.

In the months that followed, I realized my life was being punctuated by a series of catalytic moments—an awakening on the trail, a collision on the freeway, my father's final breath, and the slow invitation into rebirth. At the time, it felt like chaos. Looking back, I can see those moments set in motion a deeper process of self-examination. What once seemed isolated revealed itself as connected, each event reshaping my priorities, purpose, and perspective.

Life shapes us through catalytic moments—opportunities for change, transformation, and even transcendence. These moments are deeply personal, but never merely private. Global realities press into individual lives in intimate ways.

Climate change displaces a family. Inflation strains a young couple's budget to the breaking point. We see it in Sarah, watching floodwaters claim her Florida home; in James, skipping meals so his children can eat; and in Maria, a nurse working double shifts as prices rise. Whether it is AI reshaping how we work, create, communicate, and discern what is true, or misinformation straining a family dinner, the effect is the same: we are shaken.

At some point, we all find ourselves asking the same urgent question I asked in the rolling truck:

I'm about halfway through this. Can I survive?

Thriv'era invites us to ask a different question: not only, "Can I survive?" but *Can I grow, transform, and perhaps even thrive through this?*

Over time, that question became deeply personal. Each catalytic moment—on the trail, in the collision, in grief, and in the slow invitation to begin again—pressed in with new urgency. Life was reshaping me whether I was ready or not. The challenge and the invitation were not merely to survive these moments, but to learn, grow, and perhaps even thrive through them.

The Hike: Leaving the Familiar

In *The Inner Voice of Love*, Henri Nouwen suggests that stepping away—physically, emotionally, or spiritually—can help us reconnect with our true selves, with others, and with God. He reminds us that sometimes we must leave the familiar to awaken to something deeper. I experienced this firsthand during an extended hike along Minnesota's Superior Hiking Trail in August 2016.

I was prepared. I had the right gear, the maps, the food, the shelter, and the stamina. Still, forty-five minutes in, I was lost. Logging had obscured the path, and for nearly an hour I searched for it. Finally, three hundred miles from home, I stood frustrated and disoriented. I knew I needed to gather myself and get my bearings, so I stopped, took off

my pack, closed my eyes, and breathed. Something in me settled. When I started walking again, the trail was easier to see.

Over the next two weeks and 150 miles, a rhythm emerged: walk, drink, eat, sleep, repeat. I found joy in the simplicity. I felt, for the first time in a long time, fully present. In that stripped-down rhythm, Thoreau's old phrase took on fresh meaning for me: "to live deliberately," to face "the essential facts of life," and to ask what the trail had to teach.

The Crash: The Sudden Disruption

A month later, my world fractured.

My wife, Nancy Lee, our son Soren, and I had just celebrated Soren's birthday at a Minneapolis restaurant. We said our goodbyes in the parking lot and drove off in separate cars, unaware that the next few moments would change everything.

As I merged onto the freeway, a small car surged up behind me, following dangerously close. The driver wavered—backing off, then lunging forward again—before accelerating to pass on the right. It clipped the guardrail and slammed into my truck.

The explosion of sound.

The roll.

The slide.

My truck tipped onto its side and skidded across the pavement, spinning clockwise with the force of the crash. Everything about the physics of that moment seemed to be working against recovery.

And then—somehow—it righted itself.

Not slowly. Not gracefully. But all at once—with one violent heave—as if the crash itself had changed its mind. Metal groaned. Tires found asphalt again. I do not know how it happened. I only know I felt the weight shift, and suddenly I was back on all four wheels, still sliding, until the final impact against the guardrail stopped everything.

When I came to rest, I was facing the opposite direction. The doors were jammed. I climbed out through the broken driver's-side window and stood on the roadway, a different man from the one who had started the engine.

I walked away without a scratch—but not without consequence. The deliberate living I had discovered on the trail was now being tested by something far less chosen: the suffering of what came next.

The Death: The Final Breath

A month after the crash, the sequence came into focus.

I had spent two days sitting by my father's side, watching Gene slowly drift toward the end of his life at ninety-two. He had lived a full, wide life—one marked by travel, accomplishment, and steady strength. Sensing he might be waiting for the room to quiet before he could truly let go, I stepped out for a short walk. When I returned, the long work of letting go was complete. It was a “good” death, the closing of a storied book, yet the grief came over me with the same disorienting force as the collision on the freeway.

It was a strange, heavy mixture of emotion. I felt the ache of immediate loss and, at the same time, an overwhelming gratitude for his life. But gratitude does not make grief lighter; it only makes it more complex.

The hike had been an awakening. The crash had been a shock. But this—this mixture of love and loss—was the weight that finally pinned me down. Two of these experiences might have been manageable, but together the three created a spiritual “pile-up” I could not navigate on my own.

By the third day of sitting in my office, staring at a blank computer screen and unable to find my way through the fog, I knew I was in trouble. I wanted to disappear into the woods again, to walk until the noise quieted and the grief settled. Instead, I did the hardest thing a “survivor” can do: I reached for a lifeline. I asked for help.

In the weeks that followed, I realized I did not just need support—I needed language sturdy enough to hold what I was living.

Two questions began to follow me into ordinary days: Who are you? What are you doing here?

And slowly, a simple response became a doorway—not an explanation, but a posture:

Here. Now. Available.