

mu

"Because we're unaccustomed to it, we don't usually see that there's a third possible logical term equal to yes or no which is capable of expanding our understanding in an unrecognisable direction.

We don't even have a term for it, so I'll have to use the Japanese 'mu'.

mu means 'no thing'.

Like 'quality' it points outside the process of dualistic discrimination.

mu simply says:

'no class; not one, not zero, not yes, not no'.

It states that the context of the question is such that a yes or no answer is in error and should not be given.

'Unask the question' is what it says."

- Robert M. Pirsig from Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. (© 1974 published by Vintage UK)

Prologue:

Much of the following extracts come from a book I co-authored with a dear friend, Annabel Muis.

It is called :

“Turning Points – Regaining joy after Loss” which we self-published in 2001.

For more details, see our web-site :

www.turningpoints.name

Subtitled : How to turn SUC's into SUCCESS ;

SUC's = Sudden Unwelcome Changes.

SUCCESS = Regaining joy.

INTRODUCTION:

It is now 2010 and naturally more changes have occurred since these extracts were written, so I will catch you up at the end.

“Through my life I have experienced three serious illnesses – two potentially terminal. As a child I lost two of my toes, and most of the sight in one eye. I have been divorced twice, and in 1993 my sister committed suicide. As a consequence I have needed to learn some very effective coping skills.

Interestingly enough, it seems as if it was almost worth having every experience just for the people I met – the ‘angels’ that were there to help me through each experience. Many people who came into my life at these times helped me either by showing the way, or by giving me the strength to get through.”

“I’VE SOMETIMES THOUGHT THAT if my life was a novel or a play it would probably be panned by the critics for being overly dramatic and unbelievable.

Nevertheless, these truly are my experiences - my more major SUCs and Turning Points up 'till now.

I was born in Durban in South Africa. I'm told that I had difficulty getting conceived in the first place. My father had been virtually retrieved from Italy shell-shocked - was one of, I think, two survivors out of his whole squadron.

My mother was a nurse and met him through the hospital where she was working, and after they were married they spent the next twelve to fifteen months trying unsuccessfully to have a child. According to the family myth, they had to actually go to the hospital and perform with doctors peering through the door to see if they were doing it correctly. I still find that difficult to believe, but they insist that it was so.

My mother eventually fell pregnant, but within the first three months she found she was "allergic to me", and had asthma attack after

asthma attack. The last five months she spent flat on her back in hospital. By the time I was born my mother had had a very traumatic time of it all, and really wasn't well.

I was born 3 pounds 12 even though I was full term, dark blue in colour, and suffering from yellow jaundice. There was blood running down my lip when my mother first saw me, so she thought I also had a harelip. She apparently groaned and turned her head away, and said "Oh no. All that for this!"

Within three months of my birth she was pregnant again with my brother, and then two years after his birth my sister was born. I don't think life was very much fun for my mother, because she also had to work - my father being a practising alcoholic.

When I was three and my brother was two he was leaning on a cement flowerpot on a wall. The pot fell off and chopped off two toes of my left foot, and left the third one hanging by a thread. I remember that I had to climb up the steps, and for some reason climb in a window to go and find my mother who was busy with

the new baby. I spent a few days in hospital, and then the third toe that they had stitched on went gangrenous. The big decision was whether to treat it with antibiotics, remove that toe, or remove the whole foot. Ultimately my foot with all three toes was saved.

Over the next few years I became very self-conscious about my foot, and very introverted. During this period my father's alcoholism caused many difficulties for us all, and he attempted suicide two or three times.

Then when I was about seven I was diagnosed with polio - I was affected down my left leg and in my throat. For two or three weeks I was only semi-aware of what was going on - I was very ill. The first thing I can recall clearly is that there were bailiffs at the house and they were going to arrest my mother and godmother because they had refused to send me to an infectious diseases hospital. My mother insisted on nursing me at home. In the end I was allowed to stay at home. I overcame the illness and didn't end up with the withered leg that became the mark of polio.

Two years later at a school eye check it was discovered that I was almost completely blind in my right eye, and the next twelve months were devoted to trying to find out the cause - they couldn't diagnose it. The concern was that it had started to eat away at the back of my left eye as well. I remember overhearing that I had been booked into the Worcester School for the Blind. It was just a matter of time, and there didn't seem to be any way around the fact that I would have to go to this school and learn to cope with life as a blind person. The school was thousands of miles from where we lived and, my mother being the determined person that she was, wouldn't accept that. So she persuaded the newspapers to start a fighting fund to get me to Guys Hospital in England for diagnosis.

This went on for months and months, the paper trying to raise the money for my mother and me to go to England. Meantime it was apparent that my eyesight was becoming worse.

There was finally enough money, but just when we were due to leave and I'd started to get excited about going overseas, we were informed that a world eye conference would be held in Johannesburg. I can remember being very disappointed - by this time I was ten going on eleven - I was dreadfully disappointed we were only going to Johannesburg and not to England.

The conference was quite an ordeal because I had to spend one whole day, and half of the following day, sitting on this little wooden chair on the stage while all the best eye specialists in the world filed past me and, one by one, peered into my eyes with their ophthalmoscopes. But worse than that, to enable them to see what they were looking at, I had to have belladonna drops in my eyes non-stop all day. Anyone who's ever had them for just an hour or two will know that it's not a very pleasant experience.

Well, the problem was diagnosed as toxoplasmosis¹. So once they knew what it was I was bugged straight away into Johannesburg General Hospital. My mother

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¹ Congenital toxoplasmosis is an infection of newborn babies. These infants are usually symptom free at birth but can later manifest a wide range of signs and symptoms, including retinochoroiditis (inflammation of the retina), which can persist throughout life.

had to go back to Durban to the other children and to work, and there I was, effectively abandoned. Maybe that and being in hospital with my foot when I was three years old was where some of my fear of being alone might have come from. The treatment was sulphur, and I'm allergic to sulphur, so I had to be prepared over some weeks, to reduce my allergic reaction. Once this was done I was transferred down to Durban and spent six months in hospital there.

I think I was in hospital about nine months altogether. I'd missed a whole year of schooling, although we did some work at the hospital. Our high school started in grade eight, so I went straight to high school, which was very daunting to contend with. Then at fifteen I was taken out of school against my wishes, started work, and at the age of sixteen I left home.