

Dave & Carol, Paul, Jim and Mom,

This is the letter I've told you I am writing. The reason I'm writing this letter is because it's a lot easier to put my thoughts down in writing, I can think about what I'm saying and find the best words to express myself. I feel like I have so much catching up to do with my family, and this seems to be the most efficient way.

I feel it's time to communicate to all of you where I see myself going. Especially with the Father Coughlin issue. I drop bits and pieces of things here and there, but I've never really opened up and told you all the whole story. I really haven't opened up to much of anyone for years now, I haven't had the emotional energy to do so, and I haven't had the clarity of thought to express myself. Now that seems to be changing. For the past years, I've giving pat answers to questions that people ask me. It's easier than the truth, which is more detailed and personal. I'd rather just say "I'm a waiter" rather than explain all my reasons for quitting a good paying job etc. etc. ad nauseam. Pat answers are easy. That's been fine for the past years. I haven't wanted to venture out an express myself any further.

But, now I'm at a point where I need to open up. Obviously, my life has undergone change and I need to tell you "where I'm at" and how I got "here." And I start with my family cause I want you all to know where your brother & son is heading. In some way, we are each a part of each other lives and in this way you are a part of mine.

I feel like my life for years now has been the process of going back and letting go. Going back to explore areas of myself that I have left off along the path of my life so far and letting go of all the things that I have accumulated as "me" in order to see and experience those areas that I am going back to. Going back and letting go, that is an excellent metaphor for my life these past years.

I've always held an interest in the arts. When I was in grammar school and junior high, I gravitated to acting and did several plays. I sang in the choir when I was in 6th grade. I played magician and gave magic shows while I was in junior high. I entered speech competitions. In high school, I was "the filmmaker." I went to college to be a filmmaker.

One by one, over the years, I gave these things up. I could look back and give several reasons. I could say "Dad never encouraged the arts, he told me they were useless". But, for whatever reason, I never felt strong enough in myself (or had the opportunity) to follow my intuition and ignore what everyone around me would say. Being involved in the arts when growing up had a certain stigma and being sensitive about myself and my "boyhood" I just eventually, one by one, gave them up. Except for filmmaking. This was acceptable and even moderately cool. And, I was passionate about it. I was surprised that Dad would actually pay for me to go to school to learn filmmaking (I mean, this is what I WANTED to do!). But, even that I gave up when I didn't get accepted into the school. After that, I was the most furthest removed from the arts that I ever been. In fact, after dropping my film school goal and changing to economics, I wouldn't even go see a movie in the theater. It was like I blocked everything out.

Ironically, and logically, after my film school rejection, I was in the most searching mode. I felt restless and wanted to find a place to "fit in". Always on my mind was the concept of contributing somehow. I have always had some form of a "social conscious". When I graduated from Michigan, I wanted to take a year off

and work as a volunteer somewhere in the US. But, of course, Dad wouldn't have it. He had just paid thousands for my education and insisted I find a decent job and fit into the mold. So I did. I kinda found a happy medium with working for the United Way - big enough to pay a salary and benefits and look respectable but also perhaps a way for me to feel like I'm contributing. But, I was still searching for the right "fit."

Starting in this period of my life, I went through so many "identity" phases. I went thru the Catholic phase, the Christian phase, the Gay phase and then started all over again. I remember being so envious of David because he seemed to have the clarity of focus that I desperately wanted. He was married, knew his passion from early on and was actively pursuing his goals. I was so envious of that back then. All I knew is I'd go to bed at night and say to myself, "I'm not going to waste my life, I've got to find my niche." People in my life always remarked "Eric needs to 'find himself'", and that was true. I've definitely been unclear. Sort of like a passionate rebel without a cause. Most people seemed happy with just doing what was expected of them. *I never have been*. My twenties were definitely a time of searching and uncertainty about myself.

After the United Way, I took an even further step away from myself when I took the job with EDS. That was the furthest removed from myself that I had ever been. I never went to the movies, the theater or explored any of the arts. I had a well paying 9-5 job and bought a house. I went to church and I had alot of friends. It seemed I should be perfectly content!

TWO things happened around this time that led to the changes that I am currently going through.

FIRST, I met Joanna while working at the United Way. Joanna was just getting over with a divorce. She was also starting to sing again (she was in a band and had sang prior to being "married with children.") At that time, Paul was producing his TV show in Tucson. That's how I became aware of Public Access TV. So, one day I was watching TV and saw a program that a local guy had made - a music video program. That's how I first discovered the Public Access was available here too. I got the bug to do something visual. So Joanna and I talked and agreed that she would record a song (her first in years) and I would produce a music video (my first in years too).

To make a long story short, we did a music video together. I'm kinda laughing thinking about that video, cause I'm a bit embarrassed that 65 people crammed into my house to see it. But, it was a first attempt back into film and it was "where I was at" . That was the start of me thinking about art and theater again. The bug came back and it started to grow quickly.

Continuing to make a long story short. Joanna and I both mutually rediscovered our talents and "grew" together over the next several years. I think by the time we did our third video we both felt alot more refined.

Producing these video (and all that goes along with it) helped me grow in my confidence. I started to see myself as someone who could "get things done", since things seemed to move and work out. Others seemed to be willing to work together with me and the quality of our art grew progressively. By the time I had finished the third one (over three years after the first) I came to a point where I could see myself doing this full time, somehow. I was (and still am) idealistic in my vision of what can be done artistically, and saw this

as, on some level, as my way to contribute. All the theater stuff came back again.

But, I knew I needed money. At that point I was working at EDS and hating it. I hated the box of corporate life. The widget factory. Priorities are skewed in the corporate world - things like desk size and name plates define power and roles. Yuck. There, I feel better now. I've vented a bit of my disgust.

I was looking for an out to the corporate life. For years I was looking for an out but didn't have any clarity about myself so I stayed put. But, this video thing sparked something in me that I was willing to venture out a bit with. Since I was working in PC's, and specializing in graphics and publishing I saw some entrepreneurial opportunities and began going over in my mind ways I might make money on my own using the knowledge and resources I had at my fingertips there at EDS. I came up with a plan ... I would start a business to gain independence. Then, if successful I could use the money to fund my artistic growth and development. I could produce "on the side" to see where it leads. At that point, that seemed like a logical and possible path to get to where I wanted to be.

After doing alot of talking, reading and writing I decided that I could pull off an independent publishing business. I would be at an advantage in this because 1) I had access to high level publishing technology at work that I could use to my hearts content and 2) this was an area I knew much about. I could take what I'd learned at EDS and applying to a business.

I put a years worth of work into the business. I mean, I put alot of work into starting that publishing business. I have to say that I learned alot from doing so. Though I eventually stopped right before I invested into my first "product" I read enough, talked enough, went to seminars etc. to get a good feel for independent production and distribution. At the time I quit it, I thought it may have been wasted time. But now, looking back, it was definitely not wasted. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

All of this seemed, initially, to be working out. But then the SECOND thing happened to cause my change.

Through a series of uncomfortable events in my relationships with other people (both Dad and my friends), I decided to go to therapy. It all came to a head when my best friend at the time just laid into me one night at the bar. He let me know how he felt - he was angry. Afterwards, I knew that alot of what he was saying was right. I decided at some point that I needed help to clarify myself. I was afraid of being an manic workaholic and not able to relate on an intimate level. I was getting really strung out at that time - I was on overload. Starting a business, working full time, doing Zapala productions and maintaining some form of friendships. My friends were telling me I was missing the point - throwing the baby out with the bath water, couldn't see the forest for the trees etc. - you get the picture.

I began to see that I was unable to be an "artist" contributing a "vision" if I wasn't clear about myself. I mean to say, I could express clarity in some areas of myself, but there were alot of other areas I couldn't touch.

That was about 4 1/2 years ago when I started counseling.

What I though would be resolved in three sessions has ended up taking 4 1/2 years to muddle through. I just opened up a whole pandora's box within myself. I had spent so much time working on things outside of

