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### Robb Pearson

#### Transformation: One year after the ProAmerica Rally

Posted 7/14/2008 2:31 PM EDT

Life sometimes does more than change. It completely transforms. And the transformation I have experienced in my life since organizing and running the ProAmerica Rally on Morristown last year has been tremendous, profound, and wonderful.

My own recent experience of sudden economic loss and resulting hardship humbled me in ways I could never have anticipated. In January of this year (2008), after nearly four months of rapid financial decline and having nearly lost almost everything due to circumstances out of my control, I had no other choice but to leave the home I'd had for years and take refuge with family in Pennsylvania. It was my only remaining means for recovery, having exhausted nearly all other means, including my entire savings.

Sudden and impacting life changes have an often unexpected transformational effect. My sojourn at my family's home, especially in the beginning, was sobering, and I spent much time reflecting on my situation, and began reevaluating my beliefs, my views, and my understanding of life and human coexistence.

(BRIEF BACKSTORY: It is worth mentioning that in 1999, after my brother George's death, I had undertaken a similar reevaluation of my beliefs, a several-years journey of intently studying and experiencing a vast number of religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions, and all for the sake of being thoroughly self-informed so as to undo my own unwitting ignorance. My brother's death shook all my inner foundations, and I discovered myself facing a crisis of faith. In my youth I was an extremely devout Jehovah's Witness, possessing an unqualified sense of unshakable certainty regarding life. But having abandoned my Jehovah's Witness faith years prior (an elitist and exclusionary faith, by the way, which strongly discourages inquiring about other faiths, beliefs, or life philosophies), my sense of certainty was no longer so secure. So I started anew, unlearning many deep-rooted prejudicial preconceptions I'd acquired as a Jehovah's Witness, and committing myself to being open to learning and experiencing the broader variety of worldviews and beliefs that I had as yet never been exposed to. The journey was remarkable, enriching, and powerfully enlightening.)

The irony of this latest reevaluation I embarked on in January is the discovery that I once again had to unlearn some unhealthy beliefs and views, this time ones I had acquired over the last couple years (2005-2007) during the last leg of the journey I began in 1999. That last leg was spent within the seductive and cult-like tradition of politics and patriotism.

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It would be a vast understatement to say that politics and patriotism bear startling resemblance to fanatical religion, and in alarming ways actually exceeds the extreme overzealousness which pervades religious fanaticism. I not only witnessed this personally on numerous occasions, but was intimately caught up in divisive political and patriotic fervor when I organized and ran the ProAmerica Rally on Morristown, which was held on July 28, 2007 to protest illegal immigration and advocate local and national law enforcement policies. By that time I had allowed myself to be overly influenced by toxic super-nationalism, which was underscored by exclusionary and bigoted political viewpoints using the logic of "rule of law" as a justifying facade.

Looking back one year later at the rally and my role in putting it all together, I see now that the rally was the crowning culmination of my dark journey through the fanatical "religion" of politics and patriotism. Organizing and running the rally moved me beyond being a mere silent "parishoner" (or spectator, if you will) in politics. I had become a preacher, an itinerant evangelist, gathering literally hundreds to a gathering which was nothing less than a liturgy of mass self-adulation, fiery and angry rhetoric, flag worship, "hymns" (patriotic music was played at certain intervals during the rally), proclaiming our righteous political superiority and dispensing harsh political judgments, surrounded by protective "angels" in the form of vast numbers of police and riot officers guarding us against the unholy terror of protesting political infidels, and ultimately doing what any fanatical and extremist religious gathering does best: assailing the weak and marginalized, and sacrificing their human dignity on the altar of fear.

Today I am in a new place in life. I have learned that we sometimes must lose everything in order to be truly liberated, truly free, and in many ways reborn so as to be authentically alive. Liberated from the distracting cacophony of the human chaos surrounding us. Free from the captivity of us-them mentalities which divide and do not unify. And authentically alive to what our purpose in life truly is: Oneness without division, in harmony.

### **My renewed stance on the immigration issue**

It is noted that Benjamin Franklin once said that *"having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions, even on important subjects, which I once thought right but found to be otherwise."* Bearing this in mind, I can relate how my own recent life changes have caused me to engage in fuller consideration on certain subjects and alter previously held views. Among the views I have changed significantly are my views on the immigration issue.

Having lost nearly everything and having had to migrate elsewhere for economic recovery, I was able to imagine what it must be like for so many people who come to America to escape extreme hardship and seek a better life for themselves, their children, and their families. I recognize, of course, that the circumstances of such people are likely far more dire and challenging than mine, especially given the advantage I had of having a family to readily give me sanctuary and healing in my time of severe need. Nonetheless, my situation was enough to inspire me to deep empathy for those who come to this country for nothing more than healing from painful life conditions in their own homelands and the powerlessness that often accompanies such conditions.

My stance on the immigration issue today is let the immigrants -- these visiting neighbors -- stay. Give them sanctuary. Show them human hospitality. Do not denigrate their humanity, but uplift it. Do not degrade their human dignity, but magnify it. Do not react toward them with undue nationalistic passion, but respond to them with human compassion. Do not regard them with antipathy, but be humanly present with them by exercising empathy. Reject *us-them* nationalistic mentalities and labeling people with any politicized terminology, whether "illegal immigrant" or "undocumented worker", but instead recognize them for what they truly are: fellow human beings like us. Our neighbors.

To me this issue, among many other human issues, is no longer about politics or nationalism or the artificial fear-based notion of "sovereignty". It is an issue of our **common humanity**, and the **Oneness** that transcends social and political boundaries. And in that regard, it is my position that any artificial law penned by man which stands in opposition to natural law -- especially that natural law which indicates undivided Oneness in harmony as mankind's natural social condition and which demonstrates mercy and compassion as a paramount responsibility to our fellow human beings -- is deserving not only of total rejection but also of being absolutely and utterly opposed.

### **Oneness**

The Oneness I actively advocate -- and which I have begun actively advocating in my new home region near Reading, PA -- is a Oneness which seeks to break down walls and barriers to human compassion, human mercy, and human unity; a Oneness which opposes nationalism and divisive politics and patriotism, and the artificial policies which create greater economic and social separateness and *us-them-ness*; a Oneness which sees no borders or divisions, but instead pledges sole allegiance to the universally harmonizing and unifying plan of Nature, or "God" if you will; a Oneness which recognizes all human needs as holy, and which vigorously seeks healing in human relationships and equity in all human interrelations and coexistence.

It is up to all of us to make it happen. We need to pursue the great challenge of allowing ourselves to be transformed so that we can genuinely and authentically move forward together, especially when we are at the greatest odds with those whom we might consider our enemies. It starts with humility, then walks the path of human honesty, and finally ends up with unity and Oneness. It's not hard to do. We just need to

be committed to taking that most challenging first step.

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**marideg** wrote:

Bless you for writing this! I'm a longtime pro-immigrant activist -- married to an immigrant, made a promise to my stepkids to do what I could to help them be able to see their dad. It does me a world of good to read your reflections. We need to be listening to each other more, and shouting less. This helps a lot. Thank you again.

7/14/2008 4:52 PM EDT

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**symsess** wrote:

Robb,

Thanks for sending this to me and though I am absolutely ecstatic at your transformation I'm sorry for what you've been through. Anyone who can organize a rally obviously has a great energy to pursue what they believe. This energy can be used for positive action and I hope you'll continue to grow in this transformation.

Though I did not agree with you previously I've always known you are intelligent and I see it shining when coupled with your compassion and sense of right. I encourage you to visit some of the links at my blog and see what others are doing to bring compassion forward in this discussion.

I hope you're doing better now and please keep writing.

7/14/2008 5:10 PM EDT

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**gints07** wrote:

Mr. Pearson how old are you? You sound like something out of the 60's and early 70's. Its been tried and I gotta say it went the way of Timothy Leary, Nayru(?)jackets, magic mushrooms and well you get the point. BUT it is your right so Oneness on or is it peace?

7/14/2008 6:57 PM EDT

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**RobbPearson** wrote:

To marideg:

Thank you for your kind words. And you are very welcome. I also agree: we -- all of us -- must do much more listening, though sometimes shouting for the right cause is occasionally an appropriate thing to do. Also, I pose a challenge to you: instead of calling yourself a pro-immigrant activist, how about a "human justice advocate"? Just a thought.

To symsess:

Thank you also for your kind words. Things are better now and moving forward. And I promise to be in touch and to keep writing.

To gints 07:

I am 36.

7/14/2008 11:59 PM EDT

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**wombystar** wrote:

Robb, Thank you for writing this moving testimony - your 180 is inspiring, and definitely in the right direction! It is a very brave thing to admit that we may have been wrong in the past, but we have to keep an open mind throughout life because it is certainty that divides us.

Too many Americans see immigrants as an "other" - a group of people who are in competition with "us" - but in reality we are all human beings acting upon basic human need. It is so uplifting to see that you have gained this perspective from such an unfortunate experience, because one of the biggest mistakes that "patriots" make is assuming that immigrants have the same privilege and set of options that U.S. citizens have when they really don't. We need to stress compassion, not competition.

And gints07, I have to disagree - promoting peace, compassion, and solidarity among human beings is never going out of style!

7/15/2008 4:31 AM EDT

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**RobbPearson** wrote:

wombystar:

You're welcome, and thank you.

And you're right. Too many Americans see immigrating people as "other". Such is the evil of nationalism, which is merely one manifestation of fear. Fear causes us to divide, to build walls and barriers, and to deprecate and mistreat those who we perceive to be different from us.

At the core of human fear is the fear of becoming nothing (which is related to the fear of death), and so the coping extreme is to be excessively self-invested and self-interested, and whenever that self-investment or self-interest is threatened, people rampage (emotionally or violently). In America, the fear of many is that national identity will be lost, and so when immigrating people come here certain Americans feel threatened, especially those Americans who've attached themselves to the "cult" of patriotism in the same way fanatics attach to extremist religion. Hence the reason why such Americans unjustly target immigrating people.

7/15/2008 8:25 AM EDT

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**pravelon** wrote:

It's refreshing to read something with such openness and insight. The elements that bring us together—religion, politics, race, nationality, and family—are too often the same elements that limit, even cripple us. Good luck in PA. A lot of good people, including members of my own family, call it home. NJ is submerged in a madness right now that will make it hard for a lot of people to continue to live here.

7/15/2008 11:35 AM EDT

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