

**Eighty Four Years
in Twenty Minutes**

- A Testimony -
Mother's Day, 2014

By Mike Secondino

Eighty Four Years in Twenty Minutes

- A Testimony -
Mother's Day, 2014

By Mike Secondino

Eighty Four Years in Twenty Minutes

- Preface -

When I was in my forties, I was diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). This should have come as no surprise to me, since I was a decorated combat veteran by the time I was twenty years old, having served in Viet Nam as a crew chief in an Assault Helicopter Company, and I had been hearing more and more about combat veterans who had this PTSD.

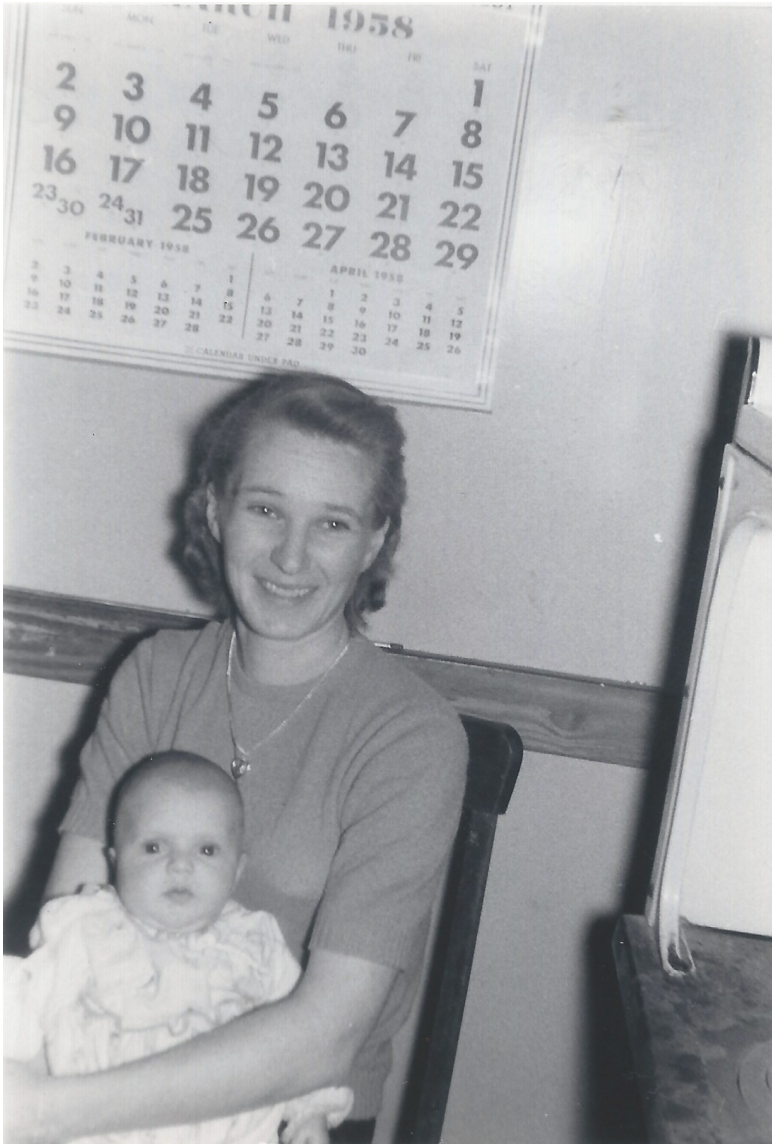
I was surprised to find out that my qualifying incident was not my military service. My understanding is that a qualifying incident can be either a solitary incident that causes trauma, like a mugging or a rape, or it can be a sustained period or repeated periods of exposure to a traumatizing environment, such as combat. My qualifying incident was my childhood.

Over the twenty-odd years since the diagnosis, a lot of healing has occurred, both in my life and in some of the lives around me, especially those of my two children. They were teenagers when I was diagnosed and already grappling with some of the same issues that I had been dealing with for most of my adult life.

I decided in 2014 that I would give a testimony about the overall healing and God's grace that lifted us out of those depressing years and gave us literally a new lease on life. I know that it is unusual to give this kind of a testimony on Mother's Day. People typically honor their mother on that day by remembering how she was such a positive influence in their lives and was always there for them.

Our pastor felt that there was merit in describing hope for those of us who weren't dealt that kind of hand. The following pages are a transcript of the talk I gave that day. The decade titles and pictures were added after the fact.

Mike Secondino
Palm Beach Gardens, FL



My mother at 28, holding my younger sister who was two months old in this picture. This was taken around my seventh birthday, in March 1958.

Mom... and My First Decade

In 1930, my mother was the second child born to two alcoholic parents. By 1945, there were six children. She was the oldest of the four girls and had an older and a younger brother. In a home with two alcoholic parents, she was essentially the primary care-giver.

By the time she was seventeen years old, she could not wait to leave home. She went to work for a man who owned a small trucking business. He had three children, all less than ten, whose mother had divorced him and lived in another state.

By the time my mother was eighteen, she was pregnant and married the man she worked for. Over the next twelve years, she bore him 6 additional children, two boys and four girls. I was her third child, born in 1951.

I was born and raised in Connecticut. The early years of my life I remember as not being much fun. Later in life I characterized the household I was raised in as “thunder and lightning.”

While my father was not an alcoholic, he *was* an opinionated and stubborn control freak. He did not seem to have any empathy or consideration for others, least of all us kids. Good or bad, things were his way without question or there was hell to pay. Whenever I saw my mother stand up to him in disagreement, the fights that ensued were horrific, physically as well as emotionally. They were apparently very good at getting under each other’s skin.

He wasn’t around all that much. When he wasn’t working, it seemed he was off fishing. When he offered to take my brother and me with him, to give Mom “a break”, we would sit in the boat, sometimes 24 to 36 hours, while he fished. According to him, we could never really do anything right, and certainly couldn’t be allowed to screw up the fishing. I can still hear the lonely sounds of the bell buoys in the middle of the forever long nights out on Long Island Sound in that 16 foot boat.

I never really knew what my mother had to put up with, or how it may have affected her. Children don’t really have that kind of insight.

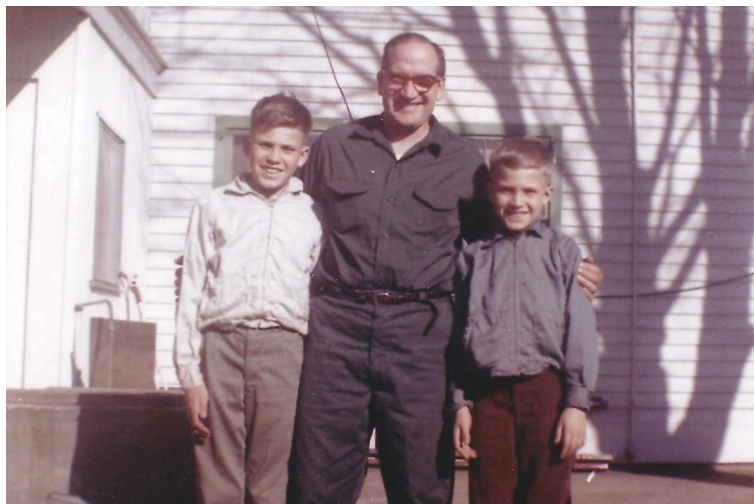
In 1958, she was in a car accident. The car she was driving was hit by a truck on the driver’s side. Among her injuries she sustained a pretty bad concussion. Over the next two years, she had some difficulty keeping it together emotionally and couldn’t really understand it. According to relatives after I became an adult, my father assured her that she was just lazy

and he wished she would “snap out of it” and try a little harder. In 1960, when I was nine and she was thirty years old, for whatever reasons, she committed suicide.

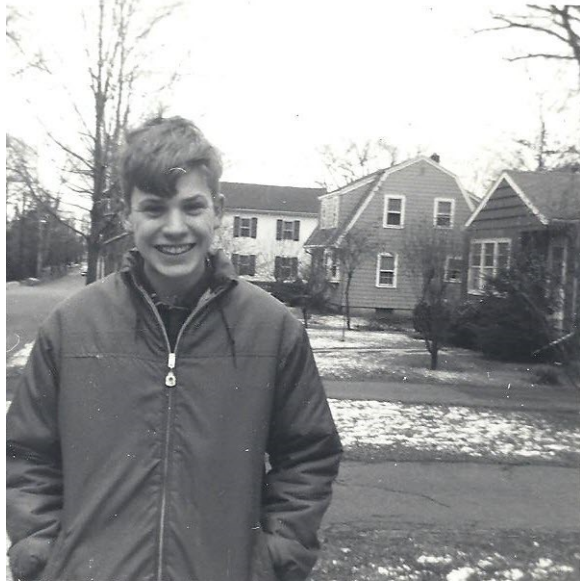
My first decade on the planet was a total bust.



My father’s and my older brother’s boats in the backyard with Dad’s raised up so we could scrape the barnacles off the bottom.



Me, Dad and my younger brother about 1960.



Me at 14 years old, on a street in my neighborhood.

My Teenage Years

My second decade, which included being a teenager, dating, high school, my first job and preparing to become an adult, wasn't much better. My father insisted we kids attend his church. He didn't attend himself, he just sent us. I saw no point to the religion that was being taught and not practiced and it became one more thing that I resented about him and my childhood.

On the subject of dating, I never really figured out how to treat the opposite sex, and my track record with girls wasn't very good.

I dropped out of High School four times. I kept going back at the beginning of the school year and leaving again in a few months.

When I was eighteen, I wound up in jail. Seems that "acting out" the way I had been in my teenage years was not going to be tolerated by the criminal justice system once I was "of age". Fortunately, the particular judge that I was standing before thought that eighteen-year-olds would learn more self-discipline in the military than in jail, and offered me probation on the condition that I joined the Army, which I gladly did.



Me at 27, with our Samoyed, Samantha, in our apartment in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

My Twenties

My twenties started off with me having a much better handle on responsibility and a pretty good work ethic. Thank you, Uncle Sam.

Still clueless about relationships, though, and my first marriage came and went like a speed bump on the on-ramp to life. It might slow you down, but not for long. The whole thing had only lasted two years, the first of which I was actually present and involved. The second year I was in another state with another woman and my attorney mailed me my final divorce decree. I remember at the time lamenting only that at the young age of 25 I had lost my first house. Oh, well, live and learn.

At 27, I was radically saved (became a true believer) by the power of God right in the living room of a small apartment in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The pastor of a little Southern Baptist church that my new fiancée and I had attended twice came by with his two deacons to see if we had any questions. I did, something to the effect that God could not love me, so I really didn't think the man should waste his time with this visit. The religion I had learned as a child taught me that God hates divorce, and to me that meant that he hated me, since I was divorced. The pastor prayed with us briefly and read me some passages from the bible, primarily from the book of Romans.

The next 10 minutes contained one of the most instantaneous and amazing reversals of mind set that I have ever per-

sonally experienced. I not only believed exactly what he read to me, on the first pass and with no additional explanation given, but when I went to the kitchen afterwards to get a glass of water, I remember very clearly thinking that my smile would not fit through the doorway. It is a moment that I will never forget for the rest of, well, not just my life but eternity really.

We were married in that church and stopped attending a short while after that because the church members voted the pastor out. After my amazing salvation experience during the pastor's visit to our home, I honestly believed that those people that called themselves Christians were all idiots. At the very least, they were certainly hypocrites.

By 28, married to my second wife, my first daughter was born. I learned a lot about love by having a baby, having never really understood or practiced it before. By age 30, having moved to Florida and settled down, my second daughter was born.



My oldest daughter shortly after we moved to Florida.



Me with the girls in our front yard just a couple of years before their mother and I divorced.

My Thirties

I entered my thirties working hard to support my family, often two shifts, which allowed my wife to stay home with the children for their first few years. She had had a troubled childhood, also, although in a different way; her parents had divorced when she was young. We agreed that we would not raise our children the way either of us had been raised. It seemed like a good plan.

I used my VA benefits to get into another mortgage and we had a nice little three bedroom house with a fenced-in back yard by the time our first one was out of diapers. It seemed like the plan was working.

My inability to relate and emote in a healthy way in a relationship were now compounded by having three relationships waiting at home for me after a demanding day at work, and things did not go well for us. I was continually out of patience in the difficult moments, just when I needed it most. And there were a lot of difficult moments in those days, particularly between my wife and me.

For me, being a responsible adult was like driving down

the interstate with a flat tire, wondering how on earth these other people were able to go seventy miles per hour so effortlessly.

I had described my childhood home as thunder and lightning, and now it looked as though my children would have a similar story to tell. We divorced when the girls were six and eight years old, after several stressful years of meaning well but missing the mark, with emotional and physical outbursts and more than a few terrifying incidents for our kids to live through.

I ended that decade by regrouping, spending quite a bit of time with my daughters during the frequent visitation (three times a week) that their mother and I had set up. Trying to make sense out of the 20 years of my adult life, I realized that I had apparently not “learned” much of anything about relationships, even after two marriages!

Not only had my second wife and I not kept our promise on the way we had decided we would raise our children, we had broken up their childhood home in the process, introducing them to and handing off to them some of the very same issues which we had been dealt.



The girls at the duck pond we often stopped by while their mother and I were separated. I still tear up when I look at pictures from this period. It was a very difficult time for both of them. Well, all three of us really.





Me and the girls when they were teenagers and I was an elder in our church. I can't believe how much I look like a TV evangelist in this picture!

My Forties

God began to draw me in a new direction. It had to be Him, because my circumstances brought me around people who were living out Christian principles, and various opportunities drew me in that direction, as well. I started my forties by marrying my hairdresser, a woman I had known and respected for many years. I did not realize it (until we started getting serious) but she was very active in her church. She was being disciplined in the prayer and deliverance ministries and I just stepped into her life style. That included studying the bible in earnest, discipleship classes, and hanging out with several other committed Christian couples who were very serious about their faith and their relationships with God.

Actually studying the bible rather than just reading it showed me many things that I could not understand before. For instance, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

"Should go" can mean a few things. My favorite interpretation is to bring up a child in the way he is *bent*, which incidentally, requires focus on the child in question and involvement in their lives to make happen. Whatever it meant, I knew I must not have been brought up that way, because I had had to depart from the way I was brought up to begin having any kind of a meaningful life!

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother... And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:1-4)

I knew I had not obeyed my parents, had not honored them, and had definitely provoked my children to wrath on more than one occasion. I certainly had not brought them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, either.

"But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15)

I learned that I had to forgive my parents, not because they deserved it, but because I could not harbor un-forgiveness toward others and be allowed to walk in God's forgiveness for myself.

"The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation." (Numbers 14:18)

Wow, this is actually a curse! So not only do we have curses that people speak against us, and curses we speak against ourselves, but God will allow the children to suffer for the sins of their parents? This was an eye-opener for me. Breaking *that* generational curse off of me and my family, first and foremost, is easily the most important miracle that I experienced in my forties, which included understanding that there *was* such a curse, and that it can be broken spiritually, by petition to God through Jesus Christ.

I have referred to my forties as the decade that I was "re-parented". For me, I finally learned the truth, that the term "loving father" is not an oxymoron! Even though I was learning a lot and meant well, I still found myself being subjected to an underlying rage that I had never really realized was always there waiting to jump out.

One day when I was about 48, I found myself in an argument with my third wife, with my hands wrapped around her throat, having decided that she would be better off dead. I was shocked that I actually *heard* myself *think* that. When my behavior surprised *me*, I knew I needed to check in with professional help, as that is an inappropriate response no matter what the issue was between us. Within a few months of that incident, I also got in an altercation with my youngest daughter, who was 17 at the time, for which I spent the night in jail. I was just completely out of patience again when I actually needed it most.

By stepping into the professional counseling, group therapy and various coursework (some court-ordered) in earnest, I was finally able to reduce the stress levels at which I had continuously lived and began to be able to sort out and dismantle the various triggers and inappropriate responses that had plagued me all of my adult life.



My friend Al, Joe, me, and Ryan on one of our many fresh water fishing jaunts.

My Fifties

My fifties I spent right here in Pastor Ken's church. Among other things that the pastor tasked me with, I worked with young people in a sense of giving back to the community in an area in which I had received much spiritual and emotional healing and deliverance. But for me, the healing just continued.

As you might have guessed, I have hated fishing since I was very young, literally all of my life. I met Josh, Ryan and Joe in that order. Josh introduced me to Ryan, and Ryan introduced me to Joe. If you spend much time with any of them, you will be going fishing. It is what they love. Once, I was preparing to go fishing with Josh and Ryan, both 15 at the time. We were in Josh's front yard putting the fishing poles and tackle in the trunk of my car when his sister, probably 13 at the time, came



Joe, Ryan and Josh got invited to go fishing with one of my customers.

wandering over and asked, casually, “Whatcha doin’?”

Well, I thought that “going fishing” was obvious so I answered, just as casually, “Learning to be 15.” And so I was. God had engineered, personally for me, after re-parenting me in my forties, a method for re-framing my lost or wasted teenage years by using my willing service to others.

There were so many more examples of that in my fifties. Some of the kids that I spent time with every week were interested in music. Bringing them around to music stores every Saturday so they could play with good instruments and talk to professional musicians as they were growing musically rekindled an interest in playing that I had had as a teenager but had never furthered. Not to mention the blessings I received by watching these kids grow musically over the years! He is an amazing God, capable of amazing things, and He has given me a front row seat to some of the amazing things He is doing!

My Sixties

Well, if my forties was a decade for being miraculously re-parented, and my fifties was a decade for re-framing some of my early years by spending time with our youth, my sixties are turning out to be years that I am just truly excited. I am excited about who I am and what God has done with me. I am excited about tomorrow and next year and the endless possibilities for my unchained existence.

I don't want to sound ungrateful for all the healing that I have received, but I got to thinking, I really could have used this forty years ago. If I had this exuberance in my twenties, if I felt about myself then the way I feel about myself now, there's no telling how many new planets could have been discovered or how many asteroids I could have named after my friends. No telling whether our political system could have been repaired or at least kept from derailing as badly as it has. No telling how many albums I could have sold worldwide. And the possibilities are quite endless... and unknown, unfortunately, because I didn't feel that way then and we can't live two parallel paths in life. We only get one.

So, to be honest, I continue to struggle with the last vestiges of forgiving and letting go of the hurts perpetuated by my parents. Two people who I don't think ever meant to hurt anyone, just unaware that they themselves were hurting and that hurting people hurt people, passing these issues down the generations until the cycle, that generational curse, is broken.

While I continue to seek God's counsel at working this out in my own life, let me back this thing up a few decades.

It doesn't take but a few minutes to become a father, and it only takes nine months more than that to become a mother. Parenting, on the other hand, raising and training up a child in the way they should go, is a commitment. It takes more time than you thought you were going to put into it, more information than you had when you started out, and an understanding or belief that it is important. The alternative is to just survive, just get through it, let the clock run out on your children's childhood and they'll grow up anyway.

God cares about us and always provides examples for us. I've seen a few excellent examples; Mothers who love, honor and respect their husbands, raising children whose father loves, honors and respects their mother, his wife, and works with her to train up his children in the way they should go without exasperating or provoking them to wrath. I don't really know how to do that, but there are people who seem to. If we talk to their children, we can tell they are being raised, trained

up. The things they are interested in, the things they want to do, want to be involved in, show that they care, about themselves and those around them. They typically seem to know who they are and where they fit in to their surroundings. They are often described as achievers, well-adjusted, content in their own skin, so-to-speak.

But this is not about being that perfect parental example. I certainly know I wasn't. Many people have circumstances that they did not choose, and they are doing the best they can with the hand they've been dealt, and a lot of them are doing an excellent job of it.

This is just a call *not* to be one of the ones who *don't* want to raise their children, whether it's too difficult or they just don't know how, or don't know that they don't know. Ones who are content to let their kids just grow up anyway; because I can tell you how *those* kids might be described. I've heard those words all my life. Under-achieving. At-risk of criminal behaviors, alcoholism and addiction. Poor self-esteem, maladjusted. And I can probably tell you how they might *feel* after just "growing up anyway". Kind of like driving down the interstate, with one or more flat tires, wondering how these other people can go seventy miles an hour so effortlessly.

As though there were some big secret to life that everyone knows but them. Well, if it is a secret, its a very simple one. You ARE, you CAN, and yes, you SHOULD! My Mother's Day message, if I thought about it, would have to be to let our kids in on that little secret ***while they're still kids!***

Thank you.



Me and my granddaughter. Ryan had come by to have me tune his guitar. When I was strumming a few chords afterward, to make sure it sounded right, Kim climbed up on my lap behind the guitar, took the pick and started strumming with it. I fingered some chords for her, and she was sounding pretty good. We were both totally immersed in this moment when Ryan grabbed my camera off the coffee table, said something, and when we both looked up took what has become one of my favorite pictures of us.

'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generation*.' (Numbers 14:18 NKJV)